



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Debate

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

col 1099 **The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat):** I beg to move, That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 22 April, be approved. ...

The Government assess that the Terrorgram collective operates as an organisation, in accordance with the guidance on the meaning of that term found in section 121 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

The Terrorgram collective is the sixth extreme right-wing group to be proscribed, along with 75 groups proscribed for extreme Islamist or other ideologies. This is based on the level of direction provided by its leadership for the preparation of propaganda campaigns and the co-ordination between the network to advance its neo-fascist, accelerationist ideology. ...

The Terrorgram collective is a transnational online network of neo-fascist terrorists who produce and disseminate violent propaganda, with the aim of radicalising readers and encouraging individuals to commit acts of terrorism. The message of hatred it preaches is one of extreme white supremacism. It calls not just for death and violence but for the collapse of western democracy itself, so that the collective might build a whites-only world in its place.

The Terrorgram collective has published three long-form, magazine-style publications, as well as a 24-minute documentary video. This propaganda is designed to incite violence towards perceived representatives of the establishment, ethnic minorities and other minority or religious communities. It not only celebrates the abhorrent cycle of violence and death that it means to inspire; it worships it, glorifying the collective's genocidal peers as so-called "saints" and encouraging readers to commit similar acts. ...

col 1100 Terrorgram holds vile antisemitic views. It has published propaganda material aimed at inciting violence against Jewish communities and the state of Israel and, most recently, celebrated Hamas's attacks on Israel, including endorsing the use of terrorism to target Israel and Jewish communities. Reporting indicates that Terrorgram has advocated for attacks on Israel's critical national infrastructure. This proscription further demonstrates our unwavering commitment to fighting antisemitism and our unfaltering support for the Jewish community. ...

Dan Jarvis (Labour): ... the Opposition support the proscription of Terrorgram as a terrorist organisation. Terrorgram takes the form of an online network of neo-fascist terrorists, who produce and share violent material that incites violent, extreme right-wing activity here in the UK and abroad. Even after our nation's existential fight and victory over fascists almost 80 years ago, their threat to our security and our way of life has never completely gone away. We must always defeat fascism wherever we find it. That is why it is important that the order before us will amend schedule 2 to the Terrorism Act 2000 to add Terrorgram to the list of proscribed organisations. Doing so will make it a criminal offence to engage with the Terrorgram group, to promote support for it or to display its logo.

col 1101 Terrorgram's name derives from it being a group on the encrypted messaging platform Telegram, so we very much welcome the innovative approach to proscription outlined by the Minister. Even though Terrorgram is without a physical presence in the UK, its online presence, which glorifies terrorist acts and shares bomb-making materials, is a threat to our national security. ...

We approve of the Government's innovative action that will lead to the rightful proscription of Terrorgram. Within legal frameworks, there must be an approach that is relentless, agile and cunning to defeat all terrorist groups. Regardless of whatever warped ideology they peddle, violent extremists across the spectrum continue to use online platforms to radicalise their support base and organise their activities. We must prepare to proscribe more online groups, if that is necessary.

These online groups—online cesspits—regularly feature violent misogyny, an abhorrent trait that is a common feature in all terrorist ideologies, including extreme right-wing terrorism. ...

Today's proscription of Terrorgram comes after the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published the Government's definition of extremism in March. Although long overdue, we believe this definition of extremism is welcome and will lead us towards better countering some of the causes of terrorist threats to our country. As the Minister would acknowledge, the new definition was always intended to be the beginning of a process to better counter extremism, not the process in its entirety. What progress has been made between the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on publishing a list of organisations designated as extremist? ...

Since 2018, police forces in England and Wales have recorded increases in reports in four out of the five hate crime strands—race, sexual orientation, disability and transgender. Furthermore, since 7 October, the Community Security Trust has recorded a 147% increase in antisemitic incidents compared with 2022, and Tell MAMA has recorded a 335% increase in anti-Muslim hate cases in the past four months alone.

The Minister will know that the last hate crime action plan was published eight years ago. He knows more than others that proscription is an incredibly important means to counter extremist activity, but it is not the only means. A new hate crime action plan could be part

of the arsenal to disrupt and defeat violent extremism. Can the Minister say what plans the Home Office has to publish an updated one?

To conclude, proscribing Terrorgram is the right thing to do for our national security. It was no longer tolerable or safe for the poison of Terrorgram's violent ideology and terrorist material to be in reach of malign actors in our country. It had to be treated with the strongest and most robust antidote: proscription. We welcome that the UK is the first country to do so. ...

col 1102 Alison Thewliss (SNP): The SNP firmly supports this order as well, and believes that no organisation should be free to spread extremist hate and encourage violence in the UK, so it is absolutely right that the Terrorgram collective is proscribed as a terrorist organisation. ...

Tech Against Terrorism, which also welcomed this proscription, has been tracking and reporting on Terrorgram's content for some time and has stated that it sent alerts on this content to seven different platforms, only four of which have removed it. I understand from the explanatory notes that this order now gives the Government the power to compel platforms to take down such content. ...

I understand that the *Huffington Post* has named a woman in the US, Dallas Humber, as Terrorgram's propagandist and a narrator of some of its content. As this is, to some extent, an issue of human rights abuses, is it possible that we can look at proscribing an individual under our existing Magnitsky legislation? ...

Extremism does not begin with organisations such as Terrorgram or with the atrocities that people inspired by Terrorgram have committed. It starts at a much lower level, and people, via the algorithms that these sites use, get exposed to more and more extremist content. Has any work gone into tracing how some of these people got to very extreme content, and what steps could have been taken to remove content at a less extreme level before they got exposed to something that radicalised them to the point of carrying out atrocities? ...

col 1103 Jim Shannon (DUP): On behalf of the Democratic Unionist party, I add my support to the Minister for his proscription of Terrorgram. ...

The Minister's announcement that the UK is the first country in the world to proscribe the Terrorgram collective is positive, and proactive by him and the Government. This group spreads vile propaganda, with evil—indeed, murderous—intent, and there is absolutely no place for it in modern society. The Minister rightly reminded the House, and myself in particular, that the group is anti-Israel and anti-Jewish. Terrorgram's hatred of Israel and the Jewish people is to be condemned unreservedly. I commend the Minister on the Government's response and their support of Israel within the law, which they have given the whole way through. On this issue, the response is critical. ... I am ... encouraged by the Minister's comments in relation to the support that he has given the Israeli people and the Jewish people in the face of downright hatred. The Terrorgram collective must be proscribed, and it must be made criminally impossible for them to operate in any fashion, so today's announcement is good news.

Does the Minister agree that social media plays a massive role in the distribution of horrific comments and opinions? While it may not entirely be the issue today, does he agree that much more needs to be done legislatively for platforms such as Telegram, and indeed others that are used by people to spew hatred, whether that be TikTok, Twitter or any other? ...

col 1104 Tom Tugendhat: ... Terrorgram is a genuinely horrific organisation. [Dan Jarvis] raised some interesting points about the protection of the Jewish community, and he is absolutely right. The Community Safety Trust, which he and I both support, will receive an additional £54 million in funding to continue to provide measures until 2028. As he knows, that commitment was made only a few weeks ago by the Prime Minister.

My hon. Friend also quite rightly raised the incidents of anti-Muslim hatred that Tell MAMA

has recorded. He is completely correct that we have sadly seen an increase in that area as well as in antisemitism, and he will know that we have also been very clear that those organisations, mosques and schools that require extra support and protection can get it from the Home Office—indeed, many have been applying, and I have had the privilege of ensuring that they are able to get the funding they need for their own security, to prevent harm to anybody in the Muslim community as well.

I want to touch briefly on some of the areas raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who made some interesting points about an individual. ... I will not speak about that individual in particular, but I will say that proscription works against organisations and is not an individual power. However, she is also aware that sanctions do work against individuals and, where we are aware that individuals are connected to such hateful organisations—certainly if they are connected to proscribed organisations, as I am confident Terrorgram will be very shortly after this debate—there is no way that somebody like that would be, in the legal term, conducive to the public good, and there is no way that they should be allowed access to the United Kingdom. ...

Question put and agreed to

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-24/debates/8A3162CC-EC3A-4CE0-9B46-0F7FEE9E500F/PreventionAndSuppressionOfTerrorism>

The definition of extremism referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-strengthens-approach-to-counter-extremism>

The Huffington Post report referred to above can be read at

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dallas-humber-terrorgram-narrator-mass-shootings_n_64010e78e4b0d14ed6a6a545

The announcement of additional funding to the CST, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-funding-will-protect-jewish-communities-from-harm>

Draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2024

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2024/9780348260656>

House of Lords Debate

Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2024 col 1687 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom): My Lords, I am grateful to the House for its consideration of this draft order, which will see the Terrorgram collective proscribed. ...

A decision to proscribe is taken only after great care and consideration, given its wide-ranging impact, and it must be approved by both Houses. ...

col 1688 The Government's assessment is that the Terrorgram collective operates as an organisation in accordance with the guidance on the meaning of that term found in Section 121 of the Terrorism Act 2000. This is based on the level of direction provided by its core leadership for the preparation of propaganda campaigns and the co-ordination between the network to disseminate the terrorist content to advance their neofascist accelerationist ideology. ...

The Terrorgram collective is a transnational online network of neofascist terrorists who produce and disseminate violent propaganda, with the aim of radicalising readers and encouraging individuals to commit acts of terrorism. Its aim is to bring about the collapse of western democracy and a race war through violent acts of terrorism.

The Terrorgram collective has published three long-form magazine-style publications, as well as a 24-minute documentary video. This propaganda is designed to incite violence towards perceived representatives of the establishment, ethnic minorities and other

minority or religious communities. Terrorgram also celebrates and glorifies the attacks committed by extreme right-wing terrorists, whom it considers to be saints, and encourages readers to commit similar attacks.

The propaganda also includes instructional material to build and use weapons. The Home Secretary has determined that the Terrorgram collective is an organisation which is concerned in terrorism. The Terrorgram collective is involved in preparing for terrorism through the inclusion of instructional material in its propaganda. It also promotes and encourages terrorism through its publications, which contain violent narratives and material that glorifies previous extreme right-wing attackers ...

col 1689 Terrorgram holds vile anti-Semitic views alongside other repulsive extreme right-wing ideologies. This organisation has published propaganda material with the aim of inciting violence against the Jewish community, and has celebrated Hamas's attacks on Israel and its use of terrorist violence. It has endorsed the use of terrorism to target the Jewish community and Israel, which is completely unacceptable. According to open-source reporting, it goes so far as to advocate for attacks on Israeli critical national infrastructure and has swapped notes on how to undermine Israel's Iron Dome air defence. This proscription will further demonstrate our unwavering commitment to fighting anti-Semitism, which has increased sharply in recent months, and our unfaltering support for the Jewish community. ...

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Labour Co-op): ... We strongly support the introduction of this order. Terrorgram, named for its use of the online messaging platform Telegram, is an online collection of violent neofascists who distribute and promote material that incites right-wing extreme terrorist activity, both in the UK and across the world.

... the propaganda distributed by this network targets violence against ethnic minorities, religious groups, women and the LGBT community. Telegram groups promote a dangerous, violent, misogynistic, homophobic and anti-Semitic ideology. They glorify terrorist attacks ... incite violent terrorist attacks and distribute bomb-making guides and other dangerous instructional material designed to aid would-be attackers. ...

col 1690 I would welcome the Minister speaking more about the Government's counterextremism strategy. Beyond the list of organisations defined as terrorist that the Government have said they will release, will a full, updated counterextremism strategy also be published? The previous strategy was published in 2015. The way Terrorgram uses online networks and platforms and intersects with other violent neo-Nazi organisations across the world demonstrates the growing complexity of the threats we face. As the terrorist threat evolves and becomes harder to predict and prevent, our understanding of the causes, nature and the consequences of the threats we face must also evolve.

The Government's hate crime strategy has also not been updated since 2015. Terrorgram's violent, bigoted ideology sits within a context of rising levels of hate crime across the UK. Hate crimes against transgender people hit record highs in England and Wales last year, and the Community Security Trust recorded a 147% increase in anti-Semitic incidents since 7 October, compared with 2022. ...

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... *col 1691* Why have we decided to proscribe the Terrorgram collective now? ... Terrorgram involves itself in preparing for terrorism through instructional material. It also promotes and encourages terrorism through its publications which contain violent narratives. ... Proscription sends such a strong message of the UK's commitment to tackling terrorism globally and calling out this activity wherever it is committed ...

The Government remain very much focused on disrupting the activities and influence of extremists, supporting those who stand up to extremism and stopping people from being drawn into terrorism. We keep our response to extremism under constant review ... The Government's current focus is to use existing mechanisms to analyse, prevent and disrupt the spread of high-harm extremist ideologies that can lead from community division and radicalisation into terrorism, particularly those that radicalise others but deliberately operate below counterterrorism thresholds. Where there is evidence of purposeful actions

that are potentially radicalising others into terrorism or violence, proportionate disruptive action will be considered. ...

col 1692 Baroness Lawlor (Conservative): ... This online terror collective ... supported acts of terrorism in Norway and Slovakia, and incitement in the Baltimore case of attacks on power substations. In common with its immediate predecessor on the list, it seeks to incite violence against Jewish people in the State of Israel, including by supporting Hamas's attack of 7 October.

Such a proscription therefore has my support, but it prompts a wider question about the Terrorism Act 2000, under which the proscriptions are made. That Act defines terrorism in Section 1, which includes "the use or threat of action where ... the use or threat is designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and ... the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious ... or ideological cause".

In subsection (2)(d), it refers to creating "a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public" and so on.

Therefore, I have a question for my noble friend the Minister. While proscription outlaws an organisation, it does not address the blatant advocacy on our streets during the pro-Palestine marches—actions of intimidation against the Jewish community in Israel or at home. These, in the words of the 2000 Act, create "a serious risk to the ... safety of the public or a section of the public", and are "designed to influence the government ... or to intimidate".

I urge my noble friend, in the same spirit of this addition to the proscribed list, to reconsider the arrangements for these marches in this context. Surely it is time for His Majesty's Government to go beyond the standard reply that policing of marches is an operational matter for the police. Does the intimidation and threat to a section of our people—the Jewish minority here and overseas—not require a more direct address by the law, given that policing to date has proved inadequate, in addition to this proscription, which I welcome?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My Lords, I appreciate the sentiments behind my noble friend's questions. I am not sure they are entirely appropriate for this format, but I will just rehash the powers conferred on the Government under the Public Order Act 1986. The Home Secretary does not have the direct power to prohibit a public procession; the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police has the power to prohibit public processions under Section 13 of the Act. Before this power can be used, they must reasonably believe that the power to impose conditions under Section 12 of the Act would not be sufficient to prevent serious public disorder, and must obtain the consent of the Secretary of State. I am afraid that those are questions that would be better addressed to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner.

Motion agreed.

To read the full transcript see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-04-25/debates/247A4A6D-20D7-43EC-9C95-A407F0144C17/TerrorismAct2000\(ProscribedOrganisations\)\(Amendment\)\(No2\)Order2024](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-04-25/debates/247A4A6D-20D7-43EC-9C95-A407F0144C17/TerrorismAct2000(ProscribedOrganisations)(Amendment)(No2)Order2024)

Draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Proscribed Organisations) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2024

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2024/9780348260656>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prime Minister's Questions

col 927 The Deputy Prime Minister (Oliver Dowden): ... I am sure that Members will want to join me in wishing the Jewish community a happy Passover, a

celebration of freedom. Of course, we remember the empty chairs of those hostages still being held captive in Gaza and call for their immediate release. ...
col 928 **Angela Raynor (Labour)**: First, may I share the Deputy Prime Minister's comments regarding our Jewish community and wish them a happy Passover? ...
col 931 **Mhairi Black (SNP)**: I join in wishing the Jewish community a happy Passover ...
Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrat): On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I ... wish a happy Passover to all those in the Jewish community. ...
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-24/debates/ED0E25E6-A937-48C1-AEF3-D82E394C0F89/Engagements>

Interfaith Dialogue

Kirsten Oswald (SNP) [902407] What steps [the Minister's] Department is taking to help promote interfaith dialogue.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): This Government are extremely supportive of efforts to bring together people of different faiths and beliefs. The faith Minister meets regularly with faith leaders to encourage these efforts, and the Department has funded a range of partners, including Near Neighbours and Strengthening Faith Institutions, to organise local level interfaith dialogue.

Kirsten Oswald: ... two months ago the Secretary of State announced that he would pull funding from the Inter Faith Network, which is the largest interfaith charity on these islands. It will close next week, after 40 years. It is an astonishing decision by the UK Government to close Britain's main forum for Jewish-Muslim dialogue now. The Secretary of State could still reverse that very poor decision, but that would have to happen this week. What are the chances of that?

Felicity Buchan: Let me explain what occurred. The closure of the Inter Faith Network is a matter for the Inter Faith Network, as an independent charity; it is not a matter for Government. We have always made it very clear to all charities that receive Government funding that they need to have sustainable sources of other funding. In my response to the urgent question about a month ago, I made clear the reasons for the closure. To repeat, the decision to withdraw the funding was taken because of the appointment of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain as a trustee. Governments of various different hues have decided that they will not deal with the Muslim Council of Britain.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-22/debates/8A6B98D4-06A1-4A55-A001-9F826D80BCCE/InterfaithDialogue>

House of Commons Written Answers

Antisemitism Policy Trust

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Conservative) [21269] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with reference to the Second Report of the House of Lords Conduct Committee of Session 2023-2024 on The conduct of Lord Mann, HL95, published on 27 March 2024, what discussions he has had with the Antisemitism Policy Trust on the use of staff funded by his Department for non-Departmental work.

Lee Rowley: Government regularly engages with the Trust among a range of other stakeholders to understand and respond to antisemitism.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/21269>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-commissioner-for-standards/conduct-of-lord-mann-hl-paper-95.pdf>

Universities: Freedom of Expression

Nadia Whittome (Labour) [23081] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that universities uphold the right to freedom of expression for students campaigning on matters relating to the (a) war in Gaza and (b) rights of Palestinians.

David Johnston: The right to freedom of speech, freedom of expression and academic freedom in higher education (HE) is one this government takes very seriously, and one that it has legislated to further protect.

Universities should be places where academics, students and visiting speakers can express a diverse range of views without fear of repercussion. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act received Royal Assent on 11 May 2023 and is now an Act of Parliament. The main provisions in the Act will come into force on 1 August 2024.

The Act will strengthen HE providers' duties to secure freedom of speech and will create a new duty to promote the importance of freedom of speech. The Act will also extend the duties to secure freedom of speech to students' unions and will establish new routes of redress if the duties are breached.

It is important to note that the Act only covers speech that is within the law. The right to freedom of speech is not an absolute right and it does not include the right to harass others or incite them to violence or terrorism. Encouraging terrorism and inviting support for a proscribed terrorist organisation are criminal offences, and HE providers should not provide a platform for these offences to be committed. In addition, providers should be very clear that any antisemitic abuse or harassment will not be tolerated.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-22/23081>

Home Office Islamic Network

Julian Knight (Independent) [21682] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether his Department provides funding to the Home Office Islamic Network; and how much staff time was taken to run that network in the last 12 months.

Tom Tugendhat: Faith and Belief networks in the Home Office do not receive any Home Office funding for their activities.

The chairs of all Faith and Belief networks including Christian, Islamic, Jewish Networks, Hindu Connection and Sikh Association are permitted up to 20% facility time with executive committee members receiving 10% to carry out network related activities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-15/21682>

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

Andy Carter (Conservative) [21357] To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what the (a) value of grants awarded by and (b) number of grant recipients for the Listed Places of Worship Scheme was since 2010.

Julia Lopez: The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme was established to reimburse the VAT paid on repairs and maintenance to the nation's listed places of worship. The grant scheme has been managed by multiple administrators on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport since it was established in 2001, and there are limited data predating 2014. Since 2010, a total of £358,356,027 has been allocated in grant funding to support places of worship throughout the UK. Based on the data the Department does possess, it can be estimated that 22,633 listed places of worship were the recipients of grant funding through the scheme since 2014.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/21357>

Information about the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, referred to above, can be read at

Teachers: Training

Jim Shannon (DUP) [21999] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to her Department's Postgraduate initial teacher training targets for the 2024/25 academic year, for what reason the target number of secondary trainees teachers of Religious Education has been reduced to 580.

Damian Hinds: Postgraduate initial teacher training is only one of many routes into the teacher workforce, all of which are considered when calculating targets. Other routes include Undergraduate higher education institution (HEI) courses, Assessment Only (AO), the upcoming teacher degree apprenticeship, returners, new to the state-funded sector entrants and newly qualified entrants that defer entry into the profession (deferrers).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/21999>

Immigration Controls: Religion

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [21209] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps his Department is taking to engage with the (a) Jewish, (b) Muslim, (c) Sikh and (d) other religious communities on their treatment by border officials.

Tom Purslove: The Home Office seeks to engage and consult with all communities and members of the public in developing our policies and services for the public. This includes people from different religious communities. We also ensure that there are equality impact assessments carried out when developing new policies and making important decisions which impact the public in line with our statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/21209>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Palestinians

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [20690] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with the (a) Palestinian and (b) Israeli ambassadors on the reunification of Palestinian families.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [20692] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his (a) Palestinian and (b) Israeli counterparts on the reunification of Palestinian families.

Palestinians: Visas

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [20691] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had discussions with the British Council on the reunification of families of Palestinians in the UK on a British Council(a) programme and (b) scholarship.

Andrew Mitchell: I refer the honourable Member to the answer given on 12 March to Question 16815, which can be found on the Q&A webpages:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-04/16815>.

Palestinians who wish to join family members in the UK must do so via the existing range of routes available.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20690>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20692>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/20691>

Energy Supply

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22109] To ask the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, what steps she has taken to ensure the UK's energy security, in the context of ongoing regional conflicts in the Middle East.

Andrew Bowie: Global energy markets continue to function normally and we have not seen any significant impact to the energy market in light of Iran's attack on Israel. We continue to monitor the situation closely.

Retail prices of petrol and diesel are primarily driven by the underlying prices in global oil markets and exchange rates. These are currently well within normal ranges of volatility and the market is functioning normally.

We continue to work with Ofgem, system operators and industry to monitor our energy security and ensure these organisations can deploy all tools at their disposal if needed to secure our supply.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22109>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Jewish Community in London: Safety

Lord Bellingham (Conservative): To ask His Majesty's Government what further measures they plan to take to enhance the safety of London's Jewish community.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom): My Lords, the Government are steadfast in their commitment to protecting our Jewish communities, which is why we have committed further funding of £72 million for the Jewish community protective security grant to continue the vital work done in protecting Jewish communities until 2028. The JCPS grant is managed by the Community Security Trust, which I had the privilege of visiting a couple of weeks ago and which provides protective security measures at Jewish schools, colleges, nurseries and some other Jewish community sites, as well as a number of synagogues.

Lord Bellingham: My Lords, does the Minister agree that the police have a very challenging task to allow peaceful marches, to protect the rights of local people who are observing the march and to arrest those who are blatantly breaking the law—and that they normally they get this right? I ask the Minister to reflect on the Gideon Falter case and just to further reflect on whether, if the person in question had been a hijab-wearing Muslim woman observing a pro-Israeli march, or, for that matter, a Catholic priest, they would have been accused of provocation and threatened with arrest? I suggest that, if that had happened, there would have been massive outrage and the police officers in question would have been dismissed. So all we are really asking for is that everyone should be treated fairly and equally.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I agree with my noble friend that the police have a hugely difficult job, but obviously a police officer telling a person that being openly Jewish is provocative is clearly very wrong. I will not speculate as to what might have happened in the case of other individuals. We should welcome the Met Police's apology. The Prime Minister recently made it clear to police forces that it is the public's expectation that they will not merely manage protests but police them and, of course, do so proportionately. My right honourable friend the Home Secretary met with Sir Mark Rowley and the Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist earlier this week, and put it very well: "Jewish people will always have the right to be able to go about their daily lives safely and freely, in London and across the UK".

The Home Secretary continued: "Sir Mark has reassured me he will make this clear to all sections of the community as a matter of urgency. The Met's focus now is rightly on reassurance, learning from what happened, and ensuring that Jewish

people are safe and feel safe in London”.

I think we should all support it in that critical endeavour.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon: My Lords, does the Minister agree that it would enhance the image and security of the wonderful Jewish people if the Jewish people in this country were to issue a strong statement dissociating themselves from the policies of the Netanyahu Government and the atrocities that have been committed on the people of Gaza, who are also human? Instead of that, the Board of Deputies has unfortunately sent a delegation to Tel Aviv showing solidarity with the Netanyahu Government, whose atrocities include the destroying of hospitals and the firing on aid convoys, killing even British people.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I think that is a deeply inappropriate question and I will not stoop so low as to answer it.

Baroness Sherlock (Labour): Perhaps I can. British Jews are no more responsible for the actions of the State of Israel than I am.

To return to the question, it is clear that this incident was deeply regrettable; that language about being “openly Jewish” was wrong and I am glad that the Met Police has apologised for it and will take the opportunity to reflect and ensure that all Londoners can have confidence in it and everyone can feel safe in their city. I will not try to second-guess policing decisions and I would not expect the Minister to do so, but I am sure that discussions are ongoing around these issues in government. I noticed that this Question was originally down to be answered by the Minister for Faith. Can the Minister tell the House whether the Minister for Faith is being drawn into these discussions so they are not simply seen as a policing or security matter?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My Lords, we have to consider all the various aspects of policing in the round. The noble Baroness is quite right; public order policing is very complex and obviously very challenging, but it remains incumbent on Sir Mark and of course the mayor as well to ensure that London remains a safe and welcoming city. As I said in an earlier answer, I believe that the force’s focus ought to be on proportionate policing, making sure that it is done properly and fairly, and obviously we will continue to back forces in that, using all aspects of government.

Baroness Foster of Aghadrumssee (Non-affiliated): My Lords, just to follow up on the noble Baroness’s point about drawing in other issues, not just leaving it to policing, the question is about enhancing the safety of our Jewish community. What more can we do to enhance it? Once it gets to policing, we know that it is in a bad place. How can we stop it getting to that point and enhance the safety of our Jewish communities right across the United Kingdom?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I think I answered that in my initial remarks, in which I mentioned the funding that has been increased for the Community Security Trust to administer in the JCPS. Just to go back to the Community Security Trust—I declare an interest as I was at the dinner where the Prime Minister announced the additional funding and I donated some money to it—the fact is that it has an enormous network, which I know is incredibly sophisticated, having seen it in operation, the police work incredibly closely with it, and it does a fantastic job. I very much praise it for all the work that it does.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, from a slightly different angle, the additional funding from the Government mentioned by the Minister is extremely welcome, but it is not assuaging the additional insecurity felt by the Jewish community after 7 October. A recent survey found that 50% of British Jews are currently considering leaving the United Kingdom. This would spell disaster for Britain, which desperately needs their talent and creativity and the diversity that they bring to British life. We as politicians have an important role to play here, and we must be extremely careful about what we say and do, which could inflame tensions and increase divisions that are growing and are already way too wide.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My Lords, I agree with the noble Baroness's statement.

Baroness Altmann (Conservative): My Lords, I am very grateful to the Government for their commitment to protect the Jewish community, and I ask my noble friend whether he will join me in paying tribute, as I am sure he will, to the CST, which is trying to keep Jews safe. I declare my interest as a British Jew and to my other interests in the register. While there are weekly marches calling for "globalising the intifada" and eradication of the only Jewish state, when Jews are pelted with bricks and beaten with bars, and children are threatened on the way to school and university students threatened on campus, I feel that it would be most appreciated if the Government would look carefully at banning more of organisations such as Palestine Action, which has come to light, and other groups which seem to want to target the Jewish community directly, when we have no responsibility for the actions of an overseas Government.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My noble friend makes some good points. Of course, as has been often stated from the Dispatch Box, the Government do not comment on ongoing matters of possible proscription. The police can of course impose conditions on protests where they believe the protest may result in a variety of civil offences, serious disorder, damage to property and so on and so forth, but the ability to actually ban protests is a complex one under the Public Order Act. Of course, I agree with my noble friend, but it is incumbent on all citizens to reassure the Jews, who are feeling so under pressure.

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated): My Lords, I am sure that noble Lords have been following the events at Columbia University and the encampment there, where there have been some pretty horrific scenes of students screaming rather maniacally to exclude "genocidal Zios", and using other very offensive and anti-Semitic slogans, and so on. It has just completely got out of hand. The global student movement is coming to the UK: "From Gaza to Columbia to London" is the slogan, and it starts at UCL at 1 pm on Friday 26 April. I am not saying that as an advert, and I am not particularly worried about people protesting or about their interpretive dance against colonisation that they are bringing over. However, I am worried about anti-Semitism on London and other British campuses. Safety is not just a policing question. Can the Minister assure us that guard is being taken against what is happening on campuses, where the levels of anti-Semitism are now routine and normalised?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My noble friend from the Department for Education assures me that there is protection on British campuses. However, I also acknowledge the points that the noble Baroness made and share her concerns; these trends are very disturbing.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Labour): My Lords, can the Minister comment on the take-up of grants for the protection of religious premises from attacks? Is he aware of some of the concerns that the processes that his department requires from faith communities are extremely complicated for often quite small sums of money?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I am afraid that I do not have any statistics to hand on that. But, again, the money that we were talking about making available in my initial Answer is administered by the Community Security Trust; there is no application process to access that pool of funds.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-04-25/debates/FB21E245-087C-4579-878E-2FFE8DFF4CAA/JewishCommunityInLondonSafety>

The research referred to above by Baroness Burt of Solihull can be read at
<https://antisemitism.org/almost-70-of-british-jews-are-hiding-their-identity-and-almost-half-have-considered-leaving-britain-since-7th-october-new-cao-polling-shows/>

Family Reunion Visas: Gaza

Lord Dubs (Labour): To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to assist family reunion under the existing visa rules for persons in Gaza.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom): My Lords, in any humanitarian situation, the UK must consider its resettlement approach in the round, rather than on a crisis-by-crisis basis. We use existing pathways in response to events to support British nationals, those settled here and their family members. At present, there are no plans to create a new immigration route for those affected by the security situation.

Lord Dubs: There are Palestinian families here who would urgently like family reunion with their relatives in Gaza on a temporary basis, perhaps modelled on the Ukrainian scheme. People are in real difficulties. Would the Minister care to comment on this? People in Gaza cannot apply for a family reunion visa to join family in the UK without leaving Gaza—but they cannot leave Gaza without a visa. Surely we can do better than that.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: My Lords, the safety of all British nationals affected by the conflict in Gaza continues to be our utmost priority, but individuals who are not British nationals should apply for a visa to enable them to enter the UK in the normal way—and of course much of the process is online. Individuals who are not British citizens must not travel to the UK without existing permission to enter or remain previously agreed.

Baroness Berridge (Conservative): My Lords, under the Ukrainian scheme, about 174,000 people came to the UK, and there were extensive categories of family relationships under that scheme. Can my noble friend the Minister outline whether the same categories apply for this family reunification scheme—and, if not, why not?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The Ukraine family scheme was a temporary visa approach rather than a refugee scheme. It is not a route to permanent resettlement; it formed part of the response that we made with other countries to the Russian Government's unprovoked war against Ukraine. The Ukraine family scheme was developed in close consultation with the Government of Ukraine, who have been very clear that they would like their citizens to return to Ukraine when it is safe to do so. Obviously, similar discussions with the Government in Gaza would not be possible, so the two situations are not analogous.

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean (Labour): My Lords, how many people does the Minister think are online in Gaza to make such an application?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I am afraid that I am not terribly familiar with the internet in Gaza.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat): Is the Minister aware that the immigration tribunal judges found the Home Office's decision on this to be "irrational"? The concern is even deeper: the Home Office found itself able to expand the situation for those in Hong Kong who were under fear of persecution, but those who are in Gaza, who are in fear for their lives, the Home Office seems to be completely silent about. Therefore, there is a concern about double standards. Given the requirement on the occupying power, the Government of Israel, to ensure facilitation of the very documentation that the Minister said is necessary, what discussions has the Home Office had with its interlocutors in the Israeli Government to ensure that the visa process for documentation is facilitated?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I might dispute the noble Lord's premise there: I am not sure that I would characterise it as an occupying power. I reiterate what I said earlier: British nationals and those family members can obviously apply using normal routes.

Baroness Gohir (Crossbench): My Lords, has the Minister made an assessment on how many students from Gaza studying here in the UK cannot go back to their homes because their homes have been obliterated? What financial and other support has been provided to those students?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I am afraid that I really do not have those statistics at hand, but I shall see if they exist. ...

Baroness Blower (Labour): Can I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that, in his opening question, my noble friend Lord Dubs specifically used the word "temporary", and then prayed in aid the notion of "temporary" in supporting the Ukraine arrangements. Can the Minister think about the fact that what was being asked was whether we could find space in our hearts and systems to allow for family reunion from Gaza for those people in such dire straits, on a temporary basis?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I take the noble Baroness's point—but, as I say, we keep all existing pathways in response to events under review.

Lord Coaker (Labour): ... Judicial review has found that the family of a Palestinian refugee can apply for a visa without the use of biometrics. The Home Office has said that it is complying with that, so can the Minister outline to the Chamber how it is complying, and whether that applies to all those who should seek a visa application from Gaza?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: The noble Lord asks an important question. The judgment was handed down a couple of weeks ago; obviously, we have received the outcome and officials will provide advice very shortly to Ministers on how it will impact ongoing and future operations. ...

Lord Newby (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, can I revisit an answer that the Minister gave a moment ago? He said that Israel was not an occupying power in Gaza. My understanding, by looking at the FCDO website, is that the British Government's formal position is that Israel is an occupying power in Gaza. Could he take this opportunity either to correct what he said or to explain why the Government have changed their policy?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: If I spoke incorrectly, of course I correct it. I have not read the FCDO advice, but if that is what it says, then I correct the record. ...

Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle (Green): My Lords, in responding to the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, the Minister referred to the Government making decisions about special visa schemes on a crisis-by-crisis basis. What criteria do the Government apply in making those judgments? Perhaps the Minister can point me to where it is written down, so that we can all see how the Government are making them.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: It very much depends on the circumstances and other factors. For example, there were separate arrangements made after earthquakes in places like Turkey and Syria.

Lord Morgan (Labour): My Lords, is not the policy of issuing visas being used deliberately to cut back the number of immigrants in the country—particularly those from India—with very severe damage to, for example, research groups and universities? Could we have an undertaking that this policy will change?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: This country is actually very generous: between 2015 and 2023, some 53,574 family reunion visas were granted to family members. We are the third most generous country in Europe, after Germany and Sweden. I do not really know what this Question has to do with universities.

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Labour): My Lords, in response to an earlier question, the Minister gave a rather flippant answer when he said that he had no knowledge of the internet in Gaza. The question was serious; I ask that he reflects on his response ...

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: I disagree. How am I supposed to know how the internet runs in Gaza? It was not a flippant answer; it is factual.

Lord Cashman (Labour): My Lords, can I press the Government to find the imagination to help those in Gaza seeking refuge under the most extraordinary, inhumane circumstances? It would do the Government and this country a great deal of good if they could reach out and do something positive.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom: ... we keep all systems and processes under review.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-04-24/debates/E9E63B4A-61FD-4731-B6F6-90795D57B181/FamilyReunionVisasGaza>

The Tribunal judgement referred to above by Lord Purvis of Tweed and Lord Coaker can be read at

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

UK Parliament House of Commons Home Affairs Committee

Government response reveals no plans to publish new Hate Crime Strategy

In the report, the Home Affairs Committee raised concerns about the rise of hate crime following events in Israel and Gaza, and subsequent protests. It called for the Government to set out a clearer pathway for tackling this form of crime. It called on the Government to update its hate crime action plan, which expired in 2020, and to provide responses to recently published independent reviews into hate crime.

In its response to the report, the Government has revealed that it does not intend to publish a new hate crime strategy. The response also gives no indication of plans to publish a comprehensive response to the 2023 report into extremism by Dame Sara Khan and Sir Mark Rowley, *Operating with Impunity*. The Government did however agree to the Committee's recommendation that the operation of the Public Order Act 2023 be reviewed in post-legislative scrutiny in 2025.

Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Dame Diana Johnson said: "It is deeply troubling that the Government appears to have dropped its commitment to produce an up to date strategy setting out its approach to tackling hate crime.

We have been concerned by an apparent growth in incidents of hate crime in recent months. We would expect that the Government would be redoubling their efforts in reaction to this and we are disappointed to learn no new update will be forthcoming. However, we will be writing to the Home Office and expect them to clarify what their intentions are."

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/83/home-affairs-committee/news/201049/government-response-reveals-no-plans-to-publish-new-hate-crime-strategy/>

The Committee's report, *Policing of Protests*, referred to above can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43477/documents/218954/default/>

Operating with Impunity, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602fe034d3bf7f7220fe10e1/CCE_Operating_with_Impunity_Accessible.pdf

Policing of protests: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44440/documents/220827/default/>

UK Parliament House of Commons Library Briefing

The law on assisted suicide

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04857/SN04857.pdf>

Home Office

Terrorgram added to list of proscribed terrorist organisations

The UK is to become the first country in the world to proscribe the Terrorgram collective ... The Terrorgram collective is an online network of neo-fascist terrorists who produce and disseminate violent propaganda to encourage those who consume its content to engage in terrorist activity. ...

Home Secretary James Cleverly said: The Terrorgram collective spreads vile propaganda

and aims to radicalise young people to conduct heinous terrorist acts. This is why we are outlawing membership or support for the group – we will not tolerate the promotion or encouragement of terrorism in the United Kingdom.

It will become the first online terrorist network to be proscribed, alongside 80 other Extreme Right-Wing and Islamist organisations, as we continue to disrupt and outlaw terrorist groups to protect the British people.

The UK is the first country to proscribe this organisation, demonstrating the government's commitment to tackle Extreme Right-Wing terrorism and online radicalisation in all forms. It also showcases the ability of the proscription tool to be applied to an online terrorist network, and is the first time it has been used in this way. ...

The Terrorgram collective glorify attacks committed by neo-fascist terrorists, who they consider to be 'saints,' and encourage replication of such heinous attacks including by disseminating instructional material to help others prepare to commit acts of terrorism.

In addition to the proscription offences, several other Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT) offences continue to apply to terrorist offending online. For example, section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000 makes it a criminal offence for a person to collect or possess information, or to view it online, which is likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing for acts of terrorism. ...

Whilst Islamist-inspired terrorism continues to represent the greatest terrorist threat to UK interests, the threat from Extreme-Right Wing Terrorism is growing and evolving, particularly through the radicalisation of increasingly younger individuals from dangerous online content. ...

Security Minister Tom Tugendhat said: The Terrorgram collective is a dangerous neo-fascist organisation that actively encourages and promotes terrorist activity.

We must do everything in our power to deter and limit the reach of hateful and terrorist ideologies, and to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Proscribing the Terrorgram collective will do just that. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/terrorgram-added-to-list-of-proscribed-terrorist-organisations>

James Cleverly I met with Campaign Against Antisemitism today, to discuss what more the Met & Sadiq Khan should be doing to ensure that Jewish people are safe & feel safe in London It will never be right for anyone of any religion to feel the need to stay away from anywhere in the public realm [plus photo]

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1783579039275348316>

Ministry of Justice

Report of the Chief Coroner to the Lord Chancellor: Annual Report for 2023

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/662a32a555e1582b6ca7e5aa/chief-coroner-annual-report-2023.pdf>

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

Man who wore Hamas headband to central London rally is convicted

A protester has been found guilty of arousing suspicion he was supporting a proscribed terrorist group after he wore a Hamas headband to a pro-Palestine rally.

Khaled Hajsaad, 25, attended the protest in central London on 25 November 2023, and

wore a green headband that bore close similarities to those worn by Hamas – a proscribed terrorist organisation.

Due to those similarities, he was arrested in Trafalgar Square and the headband was seized.

Hajsaad admitted wearing the headband but denied supporting Hamas, claiming that the headband was Saudi Arabian as it resembled the flag of that country and bore a statement of his faith as a Muslim.

The prosecution's expert in Arabic and Islamic studies told the court that within the context of a pro-Palestinian march in support of Gaza, he would not expect to see flags or articles related to Saudi Arabia given that the country has not commonly been associated with the Palestinian cause.

He added that the absence of a sword on the headband would further support the case that it was not an emblem related to Saudi Arabia.

At City of London Magistrates' Court, Hajsaad was found guilty of wearing an item of clothing to arouse reasonable suspicion that he is a supporter of a proscribed organisation – namely Hamas.

Nick Price, Head of the CPS Special Crime and Counter Terrorism Division, said: "By wearing the green headband in the context of a pro-Palestine protest in central London, Khaled Hajsaad aroused suspicion that he was supporting Hamas – a proscribed terrorist organisation.

"Wearing such items in public creates a risk of encouraging others to support Hamas.

"When people break the law – whether by hateful speech, supporting proscribed organisations or by threatening public order – we prosecute swiftly and independently.

"We have already prosecuted a string of offences linked to events in the Middle East and we are working closely with the police to make sure our approach commands public confidence." ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/man-who-wore-hamas-headband-central-london-rally-convicted>

Scottish Government

First Minister Marking #Passover, First Minister @HumzaYousaf has wished happiness and peace to all who observe this joyous festival. He has paid tribute to Scotland's Jewish communities commitment to interfaith dialogue and their vital contribution to our society. [plus video]

<https://twitter.com/ScotGovFM/status/1782385588840096012>

Welsh Senedd Oral Answers

The Situation in Gaza

Peredur Owen Griffiths (Plaid Cymru) [OQ60991] What is the Government doing to support Welsh families affected by the situation in Gaza?

First Minister of Wales (Vaughan Gething): Ministers and Cabinet colleagues have met with both Jewish and Muslim leaders and community members since the start of the Israel-Gaza war. We continue to offer our condolences to all those people affected by the current crisis. A number of families and community groups are directly affected in communities across Wales. And we will continue to support any hate crime victims through our Wales Hate Support Centre.

Peredur Owen Griffiths: ... Last week at a Senedd event, we heard from Mr and Mrs Brisley from Bridgend, whose daughter and granddaughters were killed by Hamas on 7

October. They said that they hadn't heard from anyone from the Welsh Government since the loss of their loved ones. I'd like to know if the same is true for all Welsh citizens who have lost relatives in the region during the last six and a half months of bloody conflict. I'd also like to know if any support has been given to Welsh citizens who have done everything they could, financially and emotionally, to get their relatives out of the danger zone in Gaza. Some of our residents with links to Palestine have gone into eye-watering debt to safeguard their loved ones. We really need safe passages set up to avert the escalating humanitarian disaster in Gaza, and I'd like to know what the Government can do about that. And finally, given the events since 7 October, with more than 30,000 people dead, and hostages still being held, does he now agree with Members on the Plaid Cymru benches that an immediate ceasefire is the only way to guarantee the end of the bloodshed, for the return of the hostages, and an end to the famine we are seeing in Gaza?

First Minister of Wales: It's been the position of the Welsh Government for some time that there should be an immediate ceasefire. There needs to be a significant increase in routes for aid, as well as the amount of aid provided, because there is a very real humanitarian crisis taking place before us, in addition to resolving the issues around the atrocities that did take place on 7 October, which includes the release of all the hostages. Now, I don't think that, across this Chamber, people will disagree with that position. Our challenge is the level of influence we have on decision makers within the region, the talks that are taking place between different actors to try to generate a ceasefire, and the ability to stop the killing.

Now, when that comes to what we can do practically in Wales—you mentioned the family of Lianne Sharabi—we continue to provide practical support, in terms of the emotional well-being of people who live in Wales. I recognise that there are people on all sides of this conflict who are directly affected in constituencies and regions here in Wales. If the Member is able to provide me with more direct contact details for where the family are at present, and how they have or haven't accessed services, I'll happily make sure that the support that is available is provided to them. But we're really talking about practical and emotional support for families. This is an area where we don't have responsibility for dealing with both refugee and returns policies and family reunion. The Welsh Government has been clear, though, that we want a more generous approach to people seeking asylum, people fleeing war zones, and for a proper family reunion service. We actually provided funding towards the service provided by the Red Cross. As I say, I recognise that there's concern on all sides of this Chamber. We'll continue to play as constructive a role as we can do here in the Welsh Government, and with, as I say, the clarity in our call for a ceasefire, for an increase in aid and for the hostages to be released.

Darren Millar (Conservative): ... Like others in this Chamber, I have been very concerned about the increase in antisemitism, and, indeed, in anti-Muslim hatred, since 7 October, even on our streets here in Wales. Now, one of the things that the Welsh Government could do to try to address antisemitism, particularly on our university campuses, is to require, as a condition of funding for our universities, higher education institutions to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism. Is that something that your Government will require them to do?

First Minister of Wales: The Government, of course—this Welsh Government—has recognised the IHRA definition of antisemitism. So, it goes into the work that we do. It is part of how we see our delivery of a genuinely anti-racist Wales. I am pleased that the Member recognises that there has been both a rise in antisemitism on the streets in communities that we represent and, indeed, a rise in Islamophobia. I have seen that in my own constituency, sadly. I'm not sure that the proposal he makes on requiring the recognition of the IHRA as a funding condition for universities will actually help to deliver the practical measures that we need to see a reduction in antisemitism and Islamophobia on university campuses. I think it is

part of a whole society challenge and effort, where you want people to be able to discuss topics in a way that is safe and does not increase the hate and the division that already exists. That will continue to guide the approach that this Government takes in our engagement with families, communities and wider stakeholders in Wales.

John Griffiths (Labour): First Minister, many families in Newport East have been and are affected by the events in Israel and Gaza, and what they want, as we've already touched upon, is an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the release of hostages, sufficient humanitarian aid finding its way into Gaza and, indeed, the beginnings of a political process that will bring a lasting peaceful solution. António Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations, I believe has spoken very powerfully about these important moments in history and the need not to be a bystander. So, I would just say, First Minister, that we have different levels of responsibility, obviously, as you've touched upon, at different levels of Government, but it is really important for political leaders and politicians—all of us—at all levels not to be bystanders and to call for humanity to prevail.

First Minister of Wales: Again, I don't think there is a single Member across this Chamber that would disagree with the sentiment and the statement made by John Griffiths. I'm interested in how innocent civilians, whether they be Israeli or Palestinian, can actually plan a future with the peace and security that we take for granted in this country. As I said, the Welsh Government is clear: we want to see an immediate end to the killing, a ceasefire; we want to see an immediate significant increase in the aid that can be provided; we want to see hostages returned. It remains my view that the long-term way to guarantee the stability and peaceful security that citizens should expect is for there to be a viable, secure Israel, as a neighbour to a viable and secure Palestinian state. We are a long way off from that being delivered in reality.

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13874#C582922>

The Ongoing Crisis in the Middle East

Alun Davies (Labour) [OQ60974] How is the Welsh Government supporting families in Wales affected by the ongoing crisis in the Middle East?

First Minister of Wales (Vaughan Gething): ... We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing conflict, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the wider impacts in the region. We continue to work closely with Jewish and Muslim leaders to support community cohesion and ensure that any victims of hate can continue to get support through the Wales Hate Support Centre.

Alun Davies: ... I think it's worth us reflecting on what happened to Gill and Pete Brisley from Pencoed. Their daughter, Lianne, lived in Kibbutz Be'eri in southern Israel. The family had two daughters, Yahel, aged 16, and Noiya, aged 13. On 7 October, Lianne was murdered. She was murdered along with both her daughters, Yahel and Noiya. Her husband was taken hostage by Hamas. His brother, Yossi, was also taken hostage that morning. We now know that Yossi was murdered by Hamas whilst in captivity. The whereabouts and status of Eli is still unknown.

The family have been through a brutalising and tragic and horrific experience on 7 October, and we've seen since then the heartbreaking scenes that have unfolded across the middle east, and the impact on people here in Wales. Other Members have expressed that already this afternoon. I've discussed these issues with Huw Irranca-Davies, the local Member for the family, and also I know that Chris Elmore, the MP for the area, has also been active, supporting the family. Would it be possible, First Minister, for you to meet this family, who've been through such a brutal experience, and to look at how we as a Senedd and yourselves as a Welsh Government can provide support for people who have been through these experiences and continue to pray for the safe return of their son-in-law?

First Minister of Wales: I think this painfully highlights the very real human impact

of what happened not just on 7 October but what has taken place since then as well, and the images that we've all seen on such an appallingly regular basis. You don't need to be a parent to understand the real human tragedy and impact that is unfolding. ...

I'll be more than happy to work with Alun Davies and Huw Irranca-Davies to understand what practical support we might be able to provide to the family and then to see if this is an individual circumstance where that support may be required, or whether actually there is a wider opportunity to better support people directly affected by the conflict. I know from my own experience in my own constituency that I have families directly affected on all sides of the conflict. So, this isn't just an issue that has taken place somewhere else. There is a real impact in communities right across our own country, which is why we do need to continue to take an interest; even though we're not decision makers in the conflict, we have to deal with the consequences of what is happening and how we properly support our own citizens. We're more than happy to take up that conversation purposefully with the constituency Member and the family, bearing in mind it's also been raised in a previous question by a different Member as well.

Samuel Kurtz (Conservative): ... this role affords us many opportunities, and the opportunity to hear the Brisleys share their story of the devastating murder of their daughter and two granddaughters in the 7 October attacks carried out by Hamas terrorists is one of the most powerful and poignant events that I've experienced in my time as a Member of this place. It was a privilege to co-sponsor the event with the Member for Blaenau Gwent, and, as he mentioned, the Brisleys' son-in-law Eli remains a hostage, and I'm sure the whole Chamber wishes for his safe and speedy release.

Now, while the Brisleys heard and had correspondence from the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary, they received nothing from the Welsh Government, which, as a Welshman, for me, is a source of regret. Will you confirm to meet with the Brisleys and any other families who have loved ones caught up in the conflict in the middle east?

First Minister of Wales: I think what is most important, really, is how we properly support people directly affected. I'm not aware that the Welsh Government has had correspondence from the Brisley family; I know there's been direct contact with Chris Elmore, and I know that the Senedd Member here has had contact with the family in the way that we provide that supportive work. So, I want to understand what contact there has been, and, indeed, how we ensure that ongoing support is appropriate and co-ordinated with and for the family. I think that's the right way forward. And, bearing in mind what I've said to the Member for Blaenau Gwent about wanting to have a purposive way forward that supports the family, to understand not just their individual circumstances, but how we better support people who will undoubtedly be directly affected, is the right way forward.

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13874#C582948>

Northern Ireland Assembly Oral Answer

Jewish Community in Northern Ireland

T2. **Diane Dodds (DUP)** [AQT 192/22-27] asked the Minister of Justice to outline how she is working with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to ensure that the mistakes that were made by the Metropolitan Police last week, along with its attitude to the Jewish community, are not replicated here and to state whether she will issue a public statement to reassure the small and vulnerable Jewish community in Northern Ireland of its safety.

Naomi Long (Minister of Justice): As part of my role in the Department of Justice, we engage with all minority communities throughout Northern Ireland. I will continue

to do that and to provide them with reassurance in the political sense. However, how the police interact with members of any community is a matter of operational responsibility for the Chief Constable, not for me as Justice Minister. It really would be more appropriate for members of the Policing Board to take that up with the Chief Constable at their next meeting.

There is no direct link to Northern Ireland Assembly Topical Questions. The above answer can be read two answers below the following link

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024-04-22&docID=397732#AQO%20302/22-27>

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

Assisted Dying: Decriminalisation

Gerry Carroll (People Before Profit Alliance) [AQW 10249/22-27] To ask the Minister of Justice whether she has considered the decriminalisation of assisted dying.

Minister of Justice: Suicide or attempting suicide is not, of itself, a criminal offence in this jurisdiction.

It is also legal for someone from Northern Ireland to travel elsewhere for the purposes of assisted dying where it is allowed in that jurisdiction.

It is an offence, however, to encourage or assist the suicide or attempted suicide of another person.

I consider any proposed change to end of life care, including to allow for assisted dying, to be primarily a matter for the Department of Health.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=397771>

TOP

Holocaust

European Court of Human Rights

Violation of Holocaust survivors' rights owing to unpublicised war-crimes retrials

The case of Zăicescu and Fălticineanu v. Romania (application no. 42917/16) concerned the retrial and acquittal of two army officers in the 1990s who had been convicted in the 1950s of war crimes and crimes against humanity for their involvement in, among other crimes, the persecution of Romanian Jews in 1941, in particular the Iași pogrom, which Mr Zăicescu had survived, and the placement of a high number of Jews in ghettos, which was the case for both applicants.

... the European Court of Human Rights held, unanimously, that there had been: a violation of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Court found in particular that the revision of historical convictions for crimes connected with the Holocaust had not been adequately justified by the Government, and must have caused feelings of vulnerability and humiliation in Holocaust victims such as the applicants.

The Court found, by a majority, the complaints under Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment) in conjunction with Article 14 inadmissible. The ill-treatment the applicants had suffered had taken place nine years before the Convention had come into existence and 50 years before Romania had signed the Convention, and the most important procedural steps incumbent on the Government had taken place long before Romania had become a High Contracting Party. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/app/conversion/pdf/?library=ECHR&id=003-7933057-11050386&filename=Judgment%20Zaicescu%20and%20Falticineanu%20v.%20Romania%20-%20Violation%20of%20Holocaust%20survivors%E2%80%99%20rights%20owing%20to%20unpublicised%20war-crimes%20>

TOP

Israel

See also Commons written answers 20690, 20691, and 20692, “Palestinians” and “Palestinians: Visas”, 22109 “Energy Supply”, and 23081 “Universities: Freedom of Expression”,

Lords oral answers “ Jewish Community in London: Safety”, and “Family Reunion visas: Gaza”,

Welsh Senedd oral answers OQ60991 “The Situation in Gaza”, and OQ60974 “The Ongoing Situation in the Middle East”,

and the CPS press release “Man who wore Hamas headband to central London rally is convicted”

that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

Also see Commons written answers 22108 “Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps”, 22098 “Middle East”, and 22020 “Ghassan Abu Sittah”,

and FCDO press release “UK targets Iran’s ability to launch drones through new round of sanctions”

that are included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Prime Minister’s Questions

Mhairi Black (SNP): ... Two years ago, when mass graves were discovered in Ukraine, this House united in condemnation and rightly treated those graves as evidence of war crimes, which Russia must be made to answer for. Yesterday, Palestinian officials uncovered two mass graves outside the bombed hospitals in Gaza. Those graves also constitute a war crime, do they not?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course, we would expect the democratic Government of Israel to investigate any allegations of misconduct. That is exactly what they are doing, and it is exactly what the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister urge them to do. However, I find it quite extraordinary that the hon. Lady seeks to draw parallels between the legitimate war of self-defence of Israel and the conduct of Russia.

Mhairi Black: Three hundred bodies, including of the elderly and the injured, some of which had been stripped naked and mutilated, with their hands tied behind their backs. The UK’s own arms policy states that if there is even a risk that war crimes may be taking place, that is reason enough to halt the sale of arms. Given all that we know, why is the Prime Minister yet to do so?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We continue to urge the Israeli Government to investigate any allegations of misconduct. The difference though is that we can trust the Israeli Government—a democratically elected Government—to properly investigate those things. Of course, we keep the advice under review. The Foreign Secretary has recently made it clear that he has conducted a determination and has not changed his advice regarding export licences, and I think that is the correct decision.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-24/debates/ED0E25E6-A937-48C1-AEF3-D82E394C0F89/Engagements#contribution-F1F77EC1-D603-4549-B97C-E37EC65CB384>

Business of the House

Rupa Huq (Labour): ... Week after week, MPs have pushed Ministers to restore UK funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and all the while we have seen lives lost in Gaza. The stock response has been that we await the Colonna report—well, that report was published on Monday, and yet there has not been a peep from the Government. Can we have an urgent statement on this? Now that Canada, Australia, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Germany, France, Japan and, in fact, the EU have all unfrozen funding, when will we?

Penny Mordaunt: I will certainly ensure that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office has heard what the hon. Lady has said. These matters are taken extremely seriously. She will know that the Deputy Foreign Secretary has been very concerned about ensuring that there is aid and support going in to support people who have been displaced and those who need food, medical attention and many other things in Gaza and elsewhere. There may be other issues beyond the security issues the hon. Lady referred to—UNRWA has for a long time been a very financially fragile organisation. We want to ensure that the people in need, whom we wish to support, are getting aid, and that it is done in a way that does not compromise security.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-25/debates/66DFC5F9-F0DA-4334-ADAC-6D442303D487/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-F3868FD3-5D34-488D-90F4-F291CFED3675>

House of Commons Point of Order

Richard Burgon (Labour): ... The House has been receiving information about the Government's ongoing arms exports to Israel, about which the Deputy Prime Minister spoke earlier. A High Court hearing on a judicial review into arms exports, which finished yesterday, provided lots of information that—I will say this politely—is far from the impression we have been given by Ministers about arms sales, especially about how we have the most robust arms export licences in the world. One such example is that although the Government last reviewed and approved arms sales to Israel on 8 April, it appears that that did not consider the killing of three British aid workers in Israeli air strikes on Gaza on 1 April. I think we all find that shocking. Madam Deputy Speaker, can you advise how we ensure the Government are providing this House with up-to-date and accurate information, and how we can best hold the Government to account over this pressing and serious matter?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for giving me notice of it. I think he will be interested to know that Ministers were giving evidence to the Business and Trade Committee on this subject earlier today. In view of that, I am sure that he will find a way to ask Ministers about any new information that may have come to light since they last answered questions on this subject in the Chamber. I should also say that the Secretary of State for Defence has stayed to listen to his point of order, and I am sure that the Treasury Bench will feed back the points that he has made.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-24/debates/6FA0DAFD-A03D-49F0-B258-CAA41A6D5BF7/PointOfOrder>

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Trade Agreements

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [21329] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with Secretary of State for Business and Trade on reviewing trade agreements with Israel.

Andrew Mitchell: Israel remains a part of the FTA programme, and negotiations continue.

The UK and Israel already have an agreement in place which guarantees tariff free trade on 99% of goods by value. Our upgraded trade agreement is an opportunity for both parties to facilitate bilateral services trade.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/21329>

Artificial Intelligence: Israel

Anum Qaisar (SNP) [22437] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether any UK-based artificial intelligence companies have export licenses to Israel.

Alan Mak: We continue to monitor the situation in Israel and Gaza closely. The UK has not granted any export licences to UK-based AI companies to export to Israel. All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria. The UK operates one of the most robust and transparent export control regimes in the world.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-17/22437>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Israel Defense Forces: Private Military and Security companies

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [21215] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he plans to collect data on the number of UK citizens travelling to fight for the Israel Defence Force.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK recognises the right of British nationals with more than one nationality to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of their additional nationalities.

We are aware of reports of UK citizens travelling to fight for the Israel Defence Force (IDF), but the Government does not estimate the numbers of those who have done so.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/21215>

Israel Defense Forces: Private Military and Security Companies

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [22165] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, with reference to his Department's Freedom of Information response of 20 March 2024 (reference number FOI2023/23127), when his Department was told by the Israeli Foreign Ministry that that there were 80 British national lone soldiers in the Israeli Defence Forces.

Andrew Mitchell: The figure given in FOI2023/23127 was provided by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 2023. However, this is not the number of British Nationals serving in the IDF, this is the number of British Nationals who immigrated on their own, in order to serve.

The Government does not make its own estimate of the numbers of UK citizens travelling to fight for the Israel Defence Force (IDF).

The UK recognises the right of British nationals with more than one nationality to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of their additional nationalities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22165>

The Fol release referred to above is not currently available online.

The following two questions both received the same answer

Israel: Arms Trade

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [21330] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what discussions he has had with Secretary of State for Defence on suspending arms exports to Israel.

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [22117] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, when he last met with the Secretary of State for Business and Trade to discuss the sale of arms to Israel.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary continues to discuss all aspects of the current conflict in Israel with the Secretary of State for Defence.

All export licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/21330>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22117>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

Israel: International Law

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [22118] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps his Department is taking to (a) investigate and (b) verify claims on Israel's compliance with international law.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary has now reviewed the most recent advice about the situation in Gaza and Israel, and the latest assessment leaves our position on export licences unchanged.

As ever, we will keep the position under review. We will continue to use this robust legal process to assess these issues.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22118>

Israel: Military Aid

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23049] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Israeli Air Force operated planes on non-military operations have (a) landed and (b) taken off from British territory since 7 October 2023.

Leo Docherty: For operational security reasons and as a matter of policy, the MOD does not offer comment or information relating to foreign nations' military aircraft movements or operations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-22/23049>

Israel: Military Aid

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23050] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 28 November 2023 to Question 2667 on Israel: Military Aid, whether any (a) lethal and (b) other military equipment other than medical supplies has been provided to Israel since 4 December 2023.

Leo Docherty: No lethal or other military equipment has been provided to Israel by the UK Government since 4 December 2023.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-22/23050>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-11-20/2667>

Israel: Military Aid

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23053] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Royal Air Force operated planes have flown to Israel since 2 February 2024.

Leo Docherty: From 2 February 2024 to 23 April 2024, nine RAF operated planes have flown to Israel.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-22/23053>

Iran: Israel

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22107] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of the conflict between Iran and Israel on (a) global economic stability, (b) oil prices and (c) inflation.

Bim Afolami: HM Treasury is monitoring the situation closely following Iran's attack against Israel. The UK is working urgently with our allies to de-escalate the situation.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimated the potential UK economic impacts of a widening of conflict in the Middle East in their March 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook

<https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-march-2024/>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22107>

Middle East: Conflict Prevention

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [21797] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps his Department is taking to prevent regional escalation resulting from recent attacks on Israel by Iran.

Andrew Mitchell: We have condemned in the strongest terms Iran's direct attack against Israel on 13 April. It was unprecedented and reckless, and a dangerous escalation. The UK will continue to stand up for Israel's security and the security of all our regional partners. It is essential that we now prevent further escalation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-15/21797>

Iran: Israel

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [22819] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 18 April 2024 to Question 21848 on Iran: Israel, what the basis was for UK military action in defence of Israel.

Leo Docherty: As stated by the Prime Minister in the Iran-Israel Update to Parliament on 15 April 2024 (Volume 748), the UK was acting in the collective self-defence of Israel and for regional security.

There are no plans to publish the legal advice, in line with long-standing precedent.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22819>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-15/21848>

The Prime Minister's statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/5B1C3E28-F71B-4513-B1D8-54205AF8D464/Iran-IsraelUpdate>

Iran: Israel

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22106] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Prime Minister's Oral Statement of 15 April 2024 on Iran-Israel Update, Official Report, column 23, how many RAF (a) Typhoons and (b) planes were deployed to intercept Iranian drones fired into Israel on 13 April 2024; and what steps he is taking to protect service personnel in the region.

Leo Docherty: As stated by the Prime Minister on 15 April 2024, the RAF sent additional aircraft to the region and RAF aircraft shot down a number of Iranian attack drones. However, for operational security reasons I cannot comment on the specifics of this activity. The Ministry of Defence constantly reviews its force

protection measures to ensure they are appropriate.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22106>

The oral statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/5B1C3E28-F71B-4513-B1D8-54205AF8D464/Iran-IsraelUpdate>

Iran: Israel

Tobias Ellwood (Conservative) [22267] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what maritime assets are being sent to the Middle East following Iran's drone and missile attack on Israel.

Leo Docherty: As of 22 April 2024, there are no plans to reposition additional maritime assets to the Middle East. However, the UK remains ready to respond to the evolving situation as required. The Ministry of Defence has bolstered its contribution to maritime security in the region with the deployment of HMS Diamond, in support of Op PROSPERITY GUARDIAN, joining HMS Lancaster deployed in support of the long standing Op KIPION.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-17/22267>

Gaza: Civilians

Rupa Huq (Labour) [21166] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent steps his Department has taken to help evacuate people in Gaza who have permission to enter the UK.

Andrew Mitchell: FCDO staff are working with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities to ensure any remaining British nationals and eligible persons that want to leave Gaza are cleared to cross as soon as possible. The Rafah border crossing continues to be open for controlled and time-limited periods to allow specific groups of foreign nationals to cross. Whilst it is for the Egyptian and Israeli authorities to determine who is permitted to cross, and when, we have assisted over 300 people to leave so far.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/21166>

UNRWA

Michael Shanks (Labour) [22205] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, with reference to the oral contribution of 15 April 2024 by the Prime Minister, Official Report, column 37, whether he plans to publish the interim findings of the UN review into UNRWA .

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.

The UN Secretary-General has not published these interim reports.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22205>

The oral contribution referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-15/debates/5B1C3E28-F71B-4513-B1D8-54205AF8D464/Iran-IsraelUpdate#contribution-90436D43-C28C-4369-AA52-99E43DF09AB4>

Gaza: Aid Workers

Chi Onwurah (Labour) [22306] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, with reference to the oral statement of 17 April 2024 on the Humanitarian situation in Gaza by the Parliamentary Under- Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how his Department called for a wholly independent review of the killing of the World Central Kitchen aid workers; and what (a) guarantees of independence and (b) investigatory powers he has sought.

Andrew Mitchell: As the Prime Minister said in his call with Prime Minister

Netanyahu on 2 April, the UK was appalled by the killing of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers, including three British nationals, in an Israeli airstrike on 1 April. The Prime Minister called for a thorough and transparent investigation into what happened. Both the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have stressed the importance of effective deconfliction.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-17/22306>

The oral statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-17/debates/65D2C3D1-F094-4D2C-A6A2-267BAA710BE2/HumanitarianSituationInGaza#contribution-042709F4-7BBF-4ED4-AF08-36CD47736BFB>

Gaza: Israel

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22326] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, if he will make representations to his Israeli counterpart on ceasing Israel's military campaign over (a) areas where (i) residents are residing and (ii) aid is being distributed and (b) hospitals.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary was in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 17 April and held high-level talks with Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Herzog and Foreign Minister Katz. He reiterated the need for an immediate pause in the fighting in Gaza to get aid in and hostages out, to allow progress towards a sustainable ceasefire.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-17/22326>

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22327] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps he plans to take through the UN Security Council to improve the humanitarian situation of people in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government recognises the need to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis and welcomed the adoption of UNSCR 2720, which calls for expanded humanitarian access in Gaza, as well as the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

More recently, the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2728 on 25 March reflected international consensus behind the UK's position that we need an immediate pause in the fighting to get aid into Gaza, secure the release of hostages and make progress towards a permanent, sustainable ceasefire. We continue to use public and private diplomatic channels as well as multilateral fora to underline this.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-17/22327>

UNSCR 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

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))

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Stephen Crabb (Conservative) [20939] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what proportion of aid entering Gaza by truck since 7 October 2023 has been delivered by UNRWA.

Andrew Mitchell: 18% of the trucks which have crossed into Gaza since 7 October have contained aid donated by UNRWA.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-12/20939>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22325] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what

recent representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on steps Israel is taking to ensure aid is able to reach citizens in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The British Government has pressed with Israeli counterparts the urgency of getting significantly more aid into Gaza to alleviate the desperate situation.

The Foreign Secretary visited Israel on 17 April and met with Israeli counterparts. During his visit he said to Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Affairs Minister Katz that we must maintain focus on getting more aid into Gaza and getting hostages out.

On 5th April Israel committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting to Gaza, including allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez checkpoint.

The UK has urged Israel to take these steps for a long time and they are welcome. We are resolved that the international community will work with Israel to see these vital changes fully implemented.

The British Government has also called on Israel to reform its deconfliction mechanism to ensure the safety of aid workers, and to make progress on the UN's minimal operating requirements, including more visas and driver approvals granted, as well as more trucks permitted to cross into Gaza.

Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis. The UK is playing a leadership role in alleviating that suffering. We are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-17/22325>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

John Healey (Labour) [21543] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much humanitarian aid has been delivered to civilians in Gaza with the support of Armed Forces personnel in each month since October 2023.

Leo Docherty: UK Armed Forces personnel have been deployed as planning teams with Allies and partners to support the wider delivery of humanitarian aid. UK Armed Forces have directly delivered over 225 tonnes on humanitarian aid to support the civilian population of Gaza since October 2023. It is broken down by month below.

UK Armed Forces directly delivered to aid agencies via Egypt	
Oct-23	21 tonnes
Nov-23	53 tonnes
Dec-23	87 tonnes of UK and Cypriot aid
Jan-24	Nil
UK Armed Forces directly delivered to Gaza	
Feb-24	(4 tonnes of UK aid air dropped by Jordan)
Mar-24	42 tonnes
April 2024 (to 17 April)	24 tonnes

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-15/21543>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

John Healey (Labour) [21544] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much humanitarian aid his Department has delivered into Gaza by (a) land crossings, (b) maritime deliveries and (c) airdrops in each month since October 2023.

Leo Docherty: With the exception of airdrops, the Ministry of Defence has not delivered humanitarian aid directly into Gaza.

In October one RAF flight delivered 21 tonnes of aid and in November three RAF flights delivered 53 tonnes to Egypt for land crossings. In December RFA Lyme Bay delivered 87 tonnes UK and Cypriot aid into Port Said, Egypt also for land crossings.

In March the RAF airdropped 28 tonnes of aid over Gaza, with a further 36 tonnes between 1-17 April, as part of the Jordanian led mission.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-15/21544>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

John Healey (Labour) [21545] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many airdrops of humanitarian aid into Gaza the UK Armed Forces have made since October 2023.

Leo Docherty: Up to 17 April the RAF have delivered 64 tonnes of aid to Gaza over seven airdrops as part of the Jordanian led mission.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-15/21545>

Gaza: Sanitary Products

Ruth Jones (Labour) [21830] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what recent steps his Department has taken to help ensure women and girls in Gaza have access to sanitary products.

Andrew Mitchell: We have provided £4.25 million to the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, UNFPA, to provide life-saving support to vulnerable women and girls in Gaza. This support is expected to reach about 111,500 women, around 1 in 5 of the adult women in Gaza. It will support up to 100 community midwives, the distribution of around 45,000 clean delivery kits and 20,000 menstrual hygiene management kits. These dignity kits include tampons, reusable pads and underwear. The Foreign Secretary met with the London representative of UNFPA on 28 March to discuss the needs of vulnerable women and girls in Gaza and I [the Deputy Foreign Secretary] met with UNFPA Executive Director, Natalia Kanem, on 16 April in Geneva.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-15/21830>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Gender Based Violence and Sexual Offences

Baroness Helic (Coinservative) [HL3580] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports by UN experts on 19 February of "credible allegations of egregious human rights violations" against Palestinian women and girls in Gaza and the West Bank by Israel Defence Forces; and whether they have offered practical support for investigating these alleged crimes, and for caring for survivors and witnesses.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK condemns human rights abuses and sexual violence unequivocally and without exception. As I [Lord Ahmad] said to the UN Security Council during the 11 March debate following the release of Special Representative Pramila Patten's report, it is vital that all reports of sexual violence are fully investigated to ensure justice for all victims and survivors and perpetrators are held to account.

The FCDO continues to closely monitor the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and stands ready to further utilise our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) expertise and tools to ensure victims and survivors of CRSV, both Israeli and Palestinian, receive the holistic and survivor-centred support they need.

Through our PSVI programmes and dedicated funding totalling £60 million since 2012, we are leading work internationally to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and strengthen justice and support for all survivors.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3580>

The UN experts' reports referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon's speech to the Security Council referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-is-deeply-concerned-by-special-representative-pattens-findings-of-sexual-violence-on-7-october-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

Pramila Patten's report, referred to above, can be read at

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

Information about the PSVI programmes referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/preventing-sexual-violence-in-conflict-initiative>

UNRWA: Textbooks

Lord Turnberg (Labour) [HL3700] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any evidence that UNRWA is inciting hatred of Jews in the textbooks it provides in its schools in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We regularly discuss issues related to the school curriculum and textbooks with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and UNRWA. The UK-supported 2021 review of the PA curriculum found improvements in content, with previously flagged materials removed. But it also indicated that problematic content remains in Palestinian textbooks: we therefore need to see further curriculum reform from the PA, and we continue to raise this with them regularly. UNRWA and the PA are engaging seriously on this issue.

Antisemitism is abhorrent and has absolutely no place in any society, and we are committed to tackling it in all its forms.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3700>

The review referred to above can be read at

https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/IMPACT-se-Review_GEI-Report-on-PA-Curriculum.pdf

UK Parliament House of Commons Business and Trade Committee

UK arms exports to Israel

Q1 Chair (Liam Byrne, Labour): ... it is the responsibility of this Committee to oversee the work of the Department for Business and Trade, and arms export licensing is part of the DBT's policy area ...

In the light of the ICJ's provisional findings, we thought it important that we begin to bring evidence together in order to inform Parliament, and to ensure that parliamentary debates that follow from these hearings are as well informed as possible about the legal questions in play and the decisions that Ministers have taken.

Lord Sumption, if I can kick off with you, would you tell us why, having signed the letter with a number of lawyers, you believe that the UK Government should now be suspending strategic export licences?

Lord Sumption (former Justice of the Supreme Court): Two areas of international law are relevant. One is international humanitarian law, which is in the process of becoming

part of customary law, and the other is the international genocide convention. The genocide convention, which was the main line of argument in the letter that I signed, is important because it engages the responsibility of non-parties to the relevant conflict. It requires states that are party to the convention, including the UK, “to prevent and to punish” genocide, which in previous cases have been held by the ICJ to be being completely distinct obligations. The “prevent” part is a pre-emptive position; in other words, it is directed to prospective as well as actual genocide, and it is also directed to plausibly suspected genocide and not simply genocide that has been established as a fact.

There is a very well-known decision of the International Court of Justice that deals in some detail with the obligations of non-parties to the conflict. The decision in the Bosnia and Serbia case in 2007 basically establishes that all signatories to the convention have a responsibility to take “measures...within their power” that might contribute to preventing genocide. It is irrelevant, they said, that measures available to a signatory would not have been enough to prevent genocide; essentially, one needs to do what one can, even if that is not a great deal. That obligation, they said, comes into force whenever the signatory knows, or should know, that there is a serious risk of genocide, even if it has not yet happened and has not yet been proved. ...

In the interim judgment of the ICJ on 26 January ... the Court ... found, first, that the Palestinians were a distinct group entitled to protection. Secondly, they made provisional findings on the scale of loss of life and damage to buildings, based on evidence given by the reports of UN agencies and the World Health Organisation. They went on to cite evidence of genocidal intent, consisting essentially of statements by the Israeli Defence Minister and the President of Israel, Mr Herzog, some of which take one aback by the intensity of the hatred they disclose for the people of Gaza.

The critical finding follows in paragraph 54. “The facts and circumstances ... are sufficient to conclude that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa and for which it is seeking protection are plausible.” ...

I think it is being suggested in the letter that was subsequently sent by Lawyers for Israel that all that the ICJ was doing was accepting, as a matter of abstract law, that the inhabitants of Gaza had a right not to be subjected to genocide. I have to say that I regard that proposition as barely arguable. ...

Q2 Chair: ... Lord Sumption, based on the argument that you have given us today, what is the risk that the UK Government could be taken to the ICJ and successfully prosecuted if it does not suspend strategic export licences today?

Lord Sumption: That is in part dependent on the politics, in the broad sense of the word, of international tribunals. I think it is unlikely that the UK Government, given the relatively small scale of its involvement in the arms trade to Israel, would find itself on the receiving end of proceedings at the ICJ, but I have to say that I and, I assume, the other signatories of the letter have proceeded on the basis that the UK Government would wish to comply with its international obligations, and not simply to avoid a situation in which its non-compliance was brought before the ICJ.

Q3 Chair: At the core of your argument would appear to be your interpretation of the phrase “plausible risk”. You have a different interpretation of plausible risk from the argument rehearsed in the letter from UK Lawyers for Israel.

Lord Sumption: I think the difference is whether that phrase is referring to the facts of the current conflict in Gaza, or to the abstract question whether people in Gaza have the right to be protected. ...

Q4 Lord Sumption: ... the critical finding of the ICJ in the 26 January judgment is expressly stated to be based on the facts and circumstances mentioned in the paragraph preceding paragraph 54. Those facts and circumstances are, one, the status of the Gazans as entitled to protection, two, the scale of the conflict and the loss of civilian lives and property, and three, the arguably genocidal intent disclosed by a number of published

statements by prominent Israeli Government personnel. ...

Q5 Natasha Hausdorff (Legal Director at UK Lawyers for Israel): ... In respect of the issue of plausibility ... it is extremely important that we are very clear about what the Court said and did not say on 26 January. My noble and learned friend has previously correctly stated the finding of the Court in its provisional orders measure. He gave an interview on Sky News a few days after the first letter was circulated in which he stated that the ICJ has not held that Israel is guilty of genocide, but that there is a plausible case that the inhabitants of Gaza are entitled to the protection of the genocide convention. That is critical, because it is in contradistinction to the claims of the first letter that there was a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza. ...

... plausibility, at the provisional measures stage of the International Court of Justice, is a procedural matter; it is not about the alleged wrong being committed. The establishment of a prima facie case for the indication of provisional measures rests therefore on a finding that the rights claimed plausibly exist, not that there has been a violation of them. ...

The Court made no determination of the issues of intention or of the substance of the allegations that South Africa has raised. It was clear that those were issues for the merits stage, which of course comes much later in these proceedings. ...

I respectfully insist that reading a finding of plausible risk that Israel is committing genocide disregards the Court's unambiguous statements, in particular at paragraph 30, where it says that it "is not required to ascertain whether any violations of Israel's obligations under the Genocide Convention have occurred." The Court's task is to establish whether the "acts and omissions" complained of by the applicant "appear to be capable of falling within the provisions" of the genocide convention. In the Court's view, some of the rights claimed by South Africa were. That is as far as the Court went. ...

However, if the writers of the letter were right and despite the very clear wording of the Court one were to encourage the Committee to read in findings that were not the case, the Committee has just been referred to, I believe, paragraphs 45 onwards, which contain several paragraphs of very inaccurate information that has been put before the Court. I think it is clear that the Court simply did not factor this into its decision making with respect to plausibility in any event, but if you are being asked to consider that it did, then I would certainly urge pause and circumspection.

Included at paragraph 46 are references to casualty figures that have been serially debunked. ... The continual references to some 33,000 casualties now do not even accord with what Hamas, the internationally proscribed terrorist organisation, are claiming; they have indicated that they do not have identifying information for about a third of those. So we are looking, inevitably, at much lower—something in the region of 21,000 or 22,000—casualties than those being claimed even by this internationally proscribed terrorist organisation. What those casualty figures also do not indicate is any differentiation between civilians and combatants. Now, Israel has been clear that it knows, as of February, that it has killed 13,000 terrorist operatives.

Q6 Chair: Before we go into disputes about the evidence base, let me bring you back to the question that I put to Lord Sumption: on the basis of your interpretation of the plausibility judgment that was in the ICJ provisional rulings, what is your assessment of the risk that the UK will be taken to The Hague and successfully prosecuted under the genocide convention?

Q7 Natasha Hausdorff: ... It does not in and of itself imply any legal obligations for the United Kingdom. ...

Where I have seen the majority of arguments linking to the UK being put forward is in relation to the UK's general obligation as a signatory to the genocide convention and also, separately, under common article 1 of the Geneva conventions. Germany's response to the case brought by Nicaragua is instructive: Germany provided a comprehensive rebuttal to the issues of complicity. ...

I would say with relative confidence that the case against Germany is unlikely to succeed. Germany also put forward a very robust due diligence defence.

There is, however, an aspect that I urge the Committee to be very mindful of in respect of South Africa's case against Israel and now Germany in the case brought by Nicaragua, which is lawfare practices—seeking to wage politics through poorly argued and unsubstantiated cases at the International Court of Justice.

Q8 Chair: Is the line of argument that the probability of the UK being taken to The Hague and successfully prosecuted is low? ...

Natasha Hausdorff: The judgment, I am afraid, is not necessarily a legal one, but a political one. In the context of the case brought against Germany, the probability of it being in any way successful is negligible. In that respect, I expect the outcome to give pause to Nicaragua's threatened cases against anyone else. However, statements—including by UK officials and politicians—that present a flawed interpretation of the International Court of Justice's provisional order of January, and that suggest, again without evidence, that the UK Government has legal advice that Israel is breaking international law, and others making, I am afraid, unsubstantiated and very problematic assessments, undoubtedly encourage actors such as Nicaragua to engage in lawfare not just against the UK, but against other law-abiding states. ...

Q9 Lord Sumption: There are clearly differences in two areas. One, which I have already addressed, is what the ICJ provisional judgment means. ... I do not claim to be an authority on the details of the conflict, but I am impressed by the fact that a Court of considerable prestige regarded this as a matter that warranted interim measures on 26 January, and which did so for reasons that are set out, many of which are factual. ...

Since that is the only judgment that has been given so far by any international tribunal on this point, I would be inclined to give greater weight to it than to my friend's views about the quality of Nicaragua's case in another proceeding. ... although I would be the first to admit that it is not conclusive.

Q10 Natasha Hausdorff: On the casualties point, at least five statistical analyses have been carried out by statisticians, data scientists, biomathematicians and economists, including those from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Tech and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The figures, which include those put before the Court, do not add up and are likely fabricated or manipulated. ...

I was also indicating—it is important that Committee members are alive to this—that no distinction is made by this internationally proscribed terrorist organisation between civilians and combatants, and no identification of the manner in which the alleged casualties have come to die. We know that Hamas is bombing its own civilians and shooting its own civilians. We know that rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel are also falling short in the Gaza Strip.

Q11 Chair: Is it fair to say that the argument you are presenting basically rests on, first, a legal interpretation around the plausibility judgment and, secondly, a dispute about the evidential base?

Natasha Hausdorff: ... the first and only real issue is the unambiguous application of the plausibility test that the Court adopted at the provisional measures stage. ... What I have said is in no way an attack on the International Court of Justice's provisional measures order. The fact that ... provisional measures were ordered is worth mentioning because it is the nature of those provisional measures that indicate, I think, what the Court was doing here. The dissenting Ugandan judge, the Ugandan Judge Sebutinde, called the provisional measures ordered in January "redundant". That was because they simply restated the existing international law obligations on Israel—namely, to comply with its obligations under the genocide convention. The only addition was a report that the Israeli representatives provided to the Court within the permitted timeframe.

The fact that the key orders being sought by South Africa—namely, that Israel be ordered to cease its operation with immediate effect—were not ordered by the Court gives further credence to the only reading, unambiguously, of the Court’s determination of plausibility. ...

Q12 Ian Lavery (Labour): I want to ask about the High Court proceedings this week and the documents that were revealed on the export of UK weapons, which suggest that Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch authorised UK arms sales to Israel a number of days after the air strikes that killed World Central Kitchen charity workers in Gaza, including, as we all know, three British citizens. ...

Court documents also reveal that Israel is not providing the UK Government with information on any specific incidents and continues simply to provide assurances after investigating itself. In that context, can the Government comply with the UK arms export regime? ...

Lord Ricketts (former UK National Security Adviser): ... I come at this as a mere former practitioner and as an observer of what has been going on in Gaza over the last six to eight months. ... I entered the fray with an interview on the “Today” programme, in which I thought the time had come for the UK Government to suspend arms export licences.

It happened to be on 3 April and within about three hours the letter from the 600 judges and jurists, the first of the letters, was published. I had taken my cue from our own Foreign Secretary and the increasingly forceful rhetoric that we had heard from the Foreign Secretary in the weeks leading up to that about the situation in Gaza. I was not positioning myself in a debate about whether genocide was occurring, but, for example, we in the House of Lords heard from the Foreign Secretary on 5 March about “the dreadful suffering in Gaza” and “the danger of this tipping into famine and the danger of illness tipping into disease, and we are now at that point. People are dying of hunger”. Then, on the radio a few days later, the Foreign Secretary again said it was “incredibly frustrating” that Israel was not taking the steps to allow more aid into Gaza amid a “terrible humanitarian situation”. He reminded us that Israel is the occupying power and that that has responsibilities for the welfare and protection of the civilian population.

I think probably we will never know how many people have died in Gaza and certainly not in what circumstances, since journalists are more or less completely excluded from Gaza. We have all seen the images of what has been done in hospitals and civilian areas in Gaza. ...

Then we had the attack on the World Central Kitchen convoy, with seven aid workers killed. It was clearly a deliberate attack on those vehicles because they were badged very clearly. ... That was not an isolated incident. It was on that basis that I said, as a layman, that I thought there was ample evidence at this point for the Government to conclude that a suspension of our arms sales to Israel was justified.

Q13 Chair: For which there is a precedent, in August 2014.

Lord Ricketts: For which there is a precedent and, bearing in mind that we are not a major supplier of arms to Israel, my argument is open to the objection that it would be a gesture. Another way of putting it would be that we take seriously our published conditions and criteria for supplying arms, which, to criterion 2(c), is that the Government will judge whether “there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law.” That is the bar the Government have set themselves ...

Lord Sumption: ... I agree ...

Q14 Ian Lavery: You agree with what Lord Ricketts said, despite what has been revealed in the High Court this week about the fact that the Foreign Secretary and the Business and Trade Secretary agreed to continue with UK arms sales following the incident with the World Central Kitchen workers in Gaza, and the fact that the Israeli Government are basically marking their own homework and they are not complying with what they need to

comply with. ...

Lord Sumption: With respect, I do not think that what you have just said is at all inconsistent with what Lord Ricketts said a moment ago. I broadly agree with the points that you have made and I think that they are essentially the same as the ones Lord Ricketts has made. ...

Natasha Hausdorff: ... the real issue here is that this analysis—or pseudo-analysis—is being advanced on a worrying false premise ... The position was articulated by the divisional court in the Campaign Against Arms Trade case. The judgment that came out in the summer of last year was clear about the ability of the Executive to make decisions on export arms licensing, privy to information that is simply not in the public domain. ...

With respect to the very tragic incident involving World Central Kitchen, it is extraordinary to hear it described as a “deliberate attack”, when Israel has been abundantly clear about the mistaken identification and the regrettable mistake of that strike. This unfortunately happens with all law-abiding states. One only needs to think back to a recent, very well-publicised example in 2021, in the context of the evacuation of Kabul, and the US strike on an aid-worker and his family. ...

I would stress that the casualty figure inaccuracies are significant because it is on that basis that these conclusions of indiscriminate attacks or disproportionality are being drawn. I am afraid that that is not only legally illiterate, in terms of the proportionality principle in international law, which is not about comparing casualty figures. It is very clearly about weighing the anticipated, direct and concrete military advantage of a strike against the anticipated collateral damage. It is an intention-based analysis, not an effects-based analysis. All of these misrepresentations of international law are essentially feeding the mispremise upon which these conclusions are being drawn. Likewise, reference to famine has been made. As of last night, there were 650 lorries of humanitarian aid, post-inspection by Israel, that were awaiting distribution on the border, inside Gaza. Since the start of this war in October, there have been 24,018 lorries of humanitarian assistance delivered, which equates to 449,230 tonnes. ...

Q15 Lord Ricketts: ... I am sorry if I am legally illiterate, but when I talk about a deliberate strike on the World Central Kitchen convoy, I mean that there were three vehicles, and images have shown that each was struck with a precision weapon directly on the vehicle. So the Israeli forces intended to attack those vehicles; they clearly did not have accurate intelligence on who was in those vehicles, but that is a pretty critical point. ...

One of the problems the British Government have here is that it is simply impossible to verify what happens in the tactical engagements that go on constantly in Gaza, often at night, which have been going on for six months. To say with any confidence that anyone knows what weapon was used and whether conditions of proportionality were met is extremely difficult. In most conflicts that I have been involved with, the press have been there ... That is not the case in Gaza right now, so there is a great deal of difficulty. ...

Q16 Chair: We were invited to believe that the Foreign Office did an assessment and sent a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Business, and we are being asked to believe that No. 10 has no input into this decision. I would be interested in what reflections you have, as a former National Security Adviser, on that decision-making process and on whether it is an accurate representation of what could be going on now.

Lord Ricketts: ... it is the responsibility of the Business Secretary, or whatever the title of the job of the day is, and their Department to issue licences and to be accountable to Parliament for that. They do that on the basis of advice from the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence, so there is a Whitehall process.

Q17 Chair: So no one in No. 10 opines.

Lord Ricketts: I do not recall arms export licence issues coming to me while I was National Security Adviser. If it is a much broader general issue, such as an arms embargo, then certainly it would ...

Q18 Chair: So the Foreign Secretary will have written a letter to the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and copied in the Prime Minister's private secretary.

Lord Ricketts: Having said, "I have taken legal advice, and my advice is that this is still a legal action," as I understand it. ...

Q19 Chair: It is, and I think your argument is that there is no way that His Majesty's Government could have the information to make that judgment. Is that right?

Lord Ricketts: To be certain about that, no. It is a judgment ... Clearly the judgment made by Foreign Office lawyers at the moment is that the legal base is there. ...

Natasha Hausdorff: Chair, I am conscious that there is one member of the panel who has actual experience on the ground of these matters—

Chair: Yes, and Committee Members will put questions to the witnesses as they choose ...

Q20 Andy McDonald (Labour): ... Yesterday in court, it was revealed that the Secretary of State for Business and Trade last reviewed and approved arms sales to Israel on 8 April, but on the evidence from that hearing, the Government has not reviewed whether Israel is committing IHL violations since 29 January in the context of export reviews, and it has not received any legal advice on whether Israel is complying with IHL on violations after 29 February. This would mean that the Secretary of State has not considered any violations or atrocities from the last three months in her decision to keep exporting arms to Israel. ...

Lord Ricketts: ... We had the Foreign Secretary saying in Washington just last week, "as required by the UK's robust arms export control regime, I have now reviewed the most recent advice about the situation in Gaza and Israel's conduct... The latest assessment leaves our position on export licences unchanged." He doesn't say when that advice was dated ...

Q21 Andy McDonald: No, that's the point. If it is the case that it hasn't considered any alleged violations or atrocities for the last three months, given that we are told that this ongoing review is on a fortnightly basis, that seems to be entirely inconsistent and unacceptable, does it not?

Q22 Lord Ricketts: ^I would be surprised if the last legal advice they had was three months ago, given the intense public controversy about the World Central Kitchen attack ...

Q23 Andy McDonald: ... The Government says it will not grant a licence for arms exports "if it determines there is a clear risk that the items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law". ... this is a risk-based environment, not an evidence-based environment, and in terms of the facilitation of serious violations, we are not just talking about munitions and bullets and bombs; we are talking about starvation as well. ...

...what evidence is there that Israel has a genuine intent and capacity to comply with IHL as part of its Gaza operations?

Lord Sumption: The Geneva convention of 1949 forbids indiscriminate attacks on civilians, indiscriminate destruction of civilian property, and destruction of food, water and other facilities necessary for survival, and imposes an obligation to allow humanitarian relief without limit. Those are obligations that, formally speaking, exist only in conflicts between states, which this is not. On the other hand, the same principles are applied as part of customary international humanitarian law. I think the problem is that the methods used by the Israel Defence Forces are necessarily indiscriminate. Essentially, what they are trying to do is to eliminate a needle in a haystack by destroying the haystack. Each shard of grain in that haystack is a human life, so I find it very difficult to see, on the information available in the public domain, how this can be regarded as a proportionate or a discriminate approach.

Lord Ricketts: ... Israel has complete control over access to Gaza by land, sea and air,

and therefore it is within Israel's control to facilitate or impede the import of humanitarian aid. ... the language of, for example, our own Foreign Secretary or Anthony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, has become increasingly exasperated with Israel's blockage of humanitarian aid. The international community have been forced to the extremities of airdropping pallets of aid into Gaza ... and even the US building a pier to allow aid to be delivered, because Israel has refused to open Ashdod port or facilitate sea access to Gaza.

The behaviour of the western countries shows that they are indeed feeling that Israel has been blocking access. ...

As we know, Israel took every step to undermine UNRWA, the UN agency, with a lot of allegations about UNRWA staff being members of Hamas, and it effectively blocked UNRWA operations in the north of Gaza. ...

I think that the evidence shows that Israel's allies have been increasingly frustrated that Israel has not been expediting aid at a point when there is a risk of famine and disease in Gaza, and a lack of water, essential supplies and medical facilities. ...

Natasha Hausdorff: Mr McDonald, you asked specifically about evidence, and I would like to refer to the evidence that I had begun addressing earlier, namely the 449,230 tonnes of aid. It was asked how this compared with previous lorries of humanitarian assistance entering Gaza. It far outstrips the previous. It is also over three times the humanitarian provision that the World Food Programme estimates is required to feed the entire population of Gaza.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves, "What is the impediment?" Clearly, the 650 lorries that are waiting to be distributed factor into that, but it is also significant that over the last few days the Fatah authorities have been clear that Hamas in Gaza is hijacking aid, depriving civilians of that aid, stockpiling it and selling excess aid on the black market at inflated prices. It has also been accused of killing aid workers in an attempt to generate a humanitarian crisis. ... It is plain that Hamas's only aim in the current circumstances is to survive and to drive up international pressure on Israel, as it has been doing and the comments referred to are indicative of that ...

The references to some of the legal requirements on aid are also important ... It was suggested to you that humanitarian relief is required "without limit". That is not correct. Article 23 of the fourth Geneva convention is very clear that the requirement to facilitate aid into Gaza is caveated, so that it is not diverted to enemy forces. In fact, the requirement doesn't apply where aid cannot be successfully provided without diversion. ...

I come back to the casualty figures ratio. This is critical, because it is the basis upon which it seems all these allegations are being levied. The reason why it is important to have an understanding of how badly wrong—fabricated, manipulated—the casualty figures are is that it informs necessarily the casualty ratio that we see in Gaza, as regards other armed conflicts around the world. The UN statistics put the civilian to combatant ratio on general armed conflict at a very disturbing nine civilians to every one combatant. For the United States health authorities in Afghanistan and Iraq it was 3:1 and 5:1. ...

The casualty figures in this war in the context of intense urban armed conflict are unprecedented, at around 1:1. ...

Q24 Andy McDonald: ... Colonel Kemp, with your significant military experience ... Can I ask your opinion as a military operative—a renowned and decorated one at that—on whether the killing of surgeons in hospitals by sniper bullets as they go about their duties, or the dropping of dumb bombs on residential dwellings in pursuit of a military target, is within the bounds of accessibility and proportionality?

Richard Kemp (former British Army Officer and former Head of the International Terrorism Team at the Joint Intelligence Committee): ... I should just point out that I have been in Israel for most of the last six months, including spending time on the ground in Gaza on several occasions observing the actions of the IDF. I am here effectively as a

representative of a kind of think tank called the High Level Military Group, which is made up of former chiefs of staff and senior military commanders from around the world. Certainly, my direct observations, as well as my analysis of what I have seen in the media and elsewhere, is that Israel is doing all it possibly can to comply with international humanitarian law in Gaza. I have witnessed at first hand exactly the way this has been done. I could, but I will not, spend your time enumerating all the different measures that the IDF takes to prevent the loss of innocent life on a battlefield. In my own experience of all the different military forces I have been involved with or observed, they are far in excess of what most other armies are able to do.

I will give you one brief example of a case. I was inside Gaza attending a command group meeting made up of three generals and a number of other officers discussing how best to deal with an important Hamas target that was very close to a refugee centre—a school that was being used to house refugees. These military officers spent 20 minutes out of the hour-long meeting trying to work out how best to deal with the target while minimising the loss of civilian life. That is a typical way that the IDF has been operating, quite contrary to the perception. ...

Natasha's point about casualty numbers is very important. Our calculation, which is based on the most recent number given by Hamas of around 21,000 civilian casualties and then deducting the IDF's estimate of 12,000 terrorists killed, leaves something in the region of 9,000, maybe 10,000, civilians killed in this six-month conflict. When you consider the complexity of the situation, with Hamas fighters fighting deliberately from within the civilian population, trying to impel the IDF to kill their own civilians, that is deeply impressive. It is a terrible statistic to have to talk of, but it is deeply impressive ...

Q25 Andy McDonald: You are repeating the point, and of course all those deaths are terribly regretted. We see the pictures of the devastation in Gaza and the physical destruction of buildings. Given your experience, is that more consistent with a casualty death rate of 9,000 or with over 30,000? What does your experience tell you? Secondly, you, like the members of this panel, will have seen those images on social media of IDF soldiers taking great delight in some actions. They have horrified us. Now, that would not be tolerated in the British Army, so why have you got such faith in the IDF to observe those basic principles of international law? ...

Richard Kemp: ... I have seen some of these images of IDF soldiers delighting in the situation they find themselves in, and of course that is totally unacceptable. But I would disagree that you wouldn't find that in other armies—certainly, we have experienced similar problems with our own soldiers in the British Army, as have the Americans. I would say that, when those events occur, the idea is to discipline the soldiers concerned. They don't, in my view, represent the overall opinion of the IDF. It is individual soldiers misbehaving, which unfortunately is what you get in an armed force. Indeed, the IDF Military Advocate General a few months ago warned specifically against soldiers making videos of that sort and distributing them, which is deemed to be an offence in the IDF.

Q26 Charlotte Nichols (Labour): ... I am interested to know from the panel if you believe that recourse to judicial review is the most appropriate mechanism for challenging licensing decisions, and what other options there should be ...

Lord Sumption: Judicial review has its limitations because it is not the function of the court in judicial review to substitute its own judgment for that of the responsible Minister. ...

Natasha Hausdorff: I think judicial review is appropriate, but ultimately the check of judicial review is whether the proper process has been followed. Ultimately, the question of whether Israel is complying with its international humanitarian law obligations is best assessed by the Executive, and that was made clear by the divisional court's judgment in the Campaign Against Arms Trade case last year. That is because an assessment such as the one we have been discussing involves judgments about targeting and the appropriateness of targeting, and the people with the best expertise on those issues

reside, most likely, in the MOD, and perhaps also the Foreign Office. ...

Q27 Natasha Hausdorff: ... We run into the difficulty that these decisions are necessarily based on sensitive intelligence that is shared—in this case, of course, by Israel—and that would not perhaps be as comfortably shared if the intended purpose was that that information would be provided outside the Executive. Unfortunately, judicial review is perhaps the only appropriate mechanism for the kind of analysis we are considering.

Lord Ricketts: I disagree on that, because I think it is unsatisfactory that a decision should be taken just by the Executive on the basis of material that cannot be made available to the public in an area as important, sensitive and controversial as this. I rather agree that judicial review has its place, but the real place to hold Ministers to account is here in Parliament, because these judgments are all made in a broader context. ...

It is also worth pointing out that the criteria for arms export decisions are now formidably long and complex—they run to many pages—so making a judgment on them is something that Ministers have to do against a very complex background, and I think parliamentary scrutiny of that is probably the best way to give the public confidence that it has been done as well as can be expected in the circumstances.

Q28 Charlotte Nichols: ... that is the crux of what we are trying to work out today, following the Committees on Arms Export Controls clearly not functioning in the way Parliament would want them to. What is the role of this Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee and other in holding Ministers to account for decisions around arms export licences? ...

Reference has been made to lawfare, and the legal versus political distinction on some of these arguments. Do we get ourselves into a territory of arguing about whether we can, rather than whether we should, make decisions around this?

Lord Ricketts: Ministers, in the end, have to make decisions and then be accountable to Parliament for them ... they risk being taken to court if they do not have a firm legal base for the decision they have taken. But it seems to me that arms export licence decisions are no different from many other decisions made in foreign policy, defence policy, national security policy or even intelligence policy. The Intelligence and Security Committee manages to hold Ministers to account in an area that is highly sensitive and where much of the information cannot be disclosed. I think the process of parliamentary scrutiny is good.

Lord Sumption: ... The whole basis of the export control criteria for the export of arms is essentially a moral judgment about what the United Kingdom should be seen to be doing. It seems to me that there is a danger of allowing this to be too much taken over by specialised knowledge and expertise when, at the heart of it, essentially, is a moral judgment, and Parliament pre-eminently exists to impose upon Ministers its collective view as to what morality requires.

Natasha Hausdorff: ... to suggest that these are decisions that should be led by purely moral assessments is particularly dangerous because these are inevitably predicated, as they have been in the public debate so far, by misinformation and by false, inaccurate statements that have been put into the public domain that do not bear scrutiny. It is Government that is in a position to assess those properly, because it is provided with a counterfactual, and the evidence in this instance from Israel is plainly either not in the public domain or, in the case of that which has been made public, is not being given nearly the amplification that the false allegations have. ...

Q29 Jane Hunt (Conservative): This Committee is about trade ... Do you think that the comment that Lord Sumption made in the opening remarks is right? In terms of our trade being relatively small, he said something along the lines of us needing to do what we can, even if that is not a great deal. Is that true, and when is it acceptable to trade in arms?

Lord Ricketts: I think it is acceptable to trade in arms when the arms export licences meet the criteria set out by the Government. The UK does £70 billion-worth of arms exports a

year, and they do that in accordance with the criteria. It is an important part of British industry, and it creates a lot of jobs ... Arms exports are not in themselves wrong. The problem comes when the regimes using the arms are potentially going to use them in a way that contravenes their international humanitarian law and therefore our obligations. ... In the case of Israel, it is true that we are not a major arms supplier; I think the total was £42 million for the last recorded year, 2022. That is set against the many, many billions that come from the US ... Therefore, you could say it is a gesture. I would say that the issue is not so much the volume; it is whether the Government are comfortable that the criteria are being met. ...

The point has also been made, of course, that Israel might retaliate against the UK by restricting Israeli arms sales to the UK. ...

Q30 Lord Sumption: ... The arms control criteria, as stated to Parliament, broadly correspond to the international obligations of the UK under international humanitarian law. The question, therefore, is whether we are applying them, not whether we have got the right principles.

Natasha Hausdorff: I certainly agree in terms of the application of the criteria and the applicable international law. What would the implications be, and what in fact are the implications—despite the Government's assessment so far, consistent also with the United States, that Israel is complying with international law—of the sorts of calls for suspension of arms? ...

We have seen, only two weekends ago, an unprecedented and direct attack by Iran on Israel, which many have, I think correctly, suggested has been as a response to the sort of encouragement that Iran has taken from the rhetoric from the United States that was referenced earlier—it has also, in part, been coming out of the United Kingdom—vis-à-vis the application of international law in Israel's continued operation in Gaza. That has very real consequences for how emboldened Iran has felt. ...

Lord Ricketts: ... It seems to me a rather strange argument to make that Iran decided to attack Israel because of arguments made in the US and the UK about potential suspension of arms sales. I think a much more likely reason that Iran attacked Israel was because Israel attacked the Iranian consulate in Damascus and killed 13 people in the Iranian consulate in Damascus. ...

Richard Kemp: The extent of British arms trade to Israel is extremely minor: it amounts to something like less than 0.9% of Israel's total arms imports. We provide no weapons to Israel, as I understand it; we provide only technical components to some systems that can be used for weapons or for dual purposes. Much of that is used in Israeli weapons that are exported to other countries for their own use, so it is very, very minor. On the other hand, the arms imports to Britain from Israel amount to about 2.7% of our total global arms imports. They include some very significant military hardware, including tank protection, something called the Trophy system, anti-aircraft defence systems, drones and some other things that are extremely useful for our armed forces.

Of course ... it would be wrong for us to base our decision on exporting arms to Israel purely on what we get in return ... But as I mentioned before, I have seen absolutely no evidence at all of deliberate breach of international humanitarian law by Israel, and certainly not anything approaching genocide. I believe that we have a moral, and perhaps legal, obligation to protect countries against genocide under the genocide convention. In this case, in my estimation we do not have a country—Israel—that is coming anywhere near committing genocide or attempting to, but we do have a country—Israel—that is defending against genocide.

On 7 October, military forces from Hamas, from Gaza, launched a major operation, deploying more troops against Israeli civilians and military than we sent to the Falklands in the Falklands war. It was a very, very significant attack. Hamas's charter spells out its determination to commit genocide against Jews and Israelis, and its actions do the same.

Its leaders have repeated time and again their intention to pursue this. Unless we can be absolutely certain that Israel is breaching the law, I believe we should do all we can to support Israel in defending its own people against a genocide against the Jews in Israel.

Q31 Andy McDonald: Going back to this business of the relatively small amount of exports going to Israel from this country—£42 million in 2022 and 114 standard individual export licences in 2022. ... Lockheed Martin is the lead contractor for the F-35, which is built through an international coalition, with 15% of the value of F-35s made in Britain. Lockheed Martin itself said that “the fingerprints of British ingenuity can be found on dozens of the aircraft’s key components”.

The intellectual property may have gone, but is there not still an obligation on the United Kingdom, with reference to that significant contribution, to think about steps to demonstrate that commitment? Even though it may not have a particular impact now—it may be beyond a demonstration—is that not in concert with the moral obligations of this country? Is that not a valid argument to make?

Lord Ricketts: If I understand your argument, you are saying that the UK should be prepared to take a view on how F-35s are used after we have supplied components for them and after they have been delivered by Lockheed Martin to third countries. That gets us into pretty difficult territory, because there will be British components in very many arms systems around the world, with many made by the US. The capacity of the UK to dictate how a weapon is used that has some components from the UK in it is quite limited, actually. ...

Q32 Lord Sumption: Legally, we have to do what we can. We are not required to do things that are likely to have no or negligible impact, but we are required to do what we reasonably can. That includes assessing the effect that our decisions may have on other people who supply arms to Israel. ...

Q33 Natasha Hausdorff: ... Morality has been mentioned a number of times in this discussion. The point that Colonel Kemp makes is significant: there is an entity that has been subject to acts of genocide by Nukhba forces, the Hamas terrorists, and other terrorists who crossed the border on 7 October. If we are to talk about the UK’s moral approach and the moral imperative under the genocide convention, with the responsibility that we have to prevent and punish genocide, the balance weighs entirely in favour of indisputable acts of genocide, documented by Hamas on GoPro, and as promised by its leadership again and again. ...

Q34 Andy McDonald: ... if we are to make such judgments in this place, we would be better served by having sight of the Government’s legal advice, albeit with matters that will cause difficulty redacted. Surely, if we are to make an informed statement or to come to a judgment in this place, we should have sight of that advice.

Lord Sumption: I entirely agree. ...

Q36 Ian Lavery: ... Colonel Kemp, what is your response to the suggestion that there might be a reciprocal move by Israel against the UK following a potential ban of UK arms exports? Would that not be much more significant because of the possible impact on UK-Israel defence co-operation and intelligence sharing? ...

Richard Kemp: ... we are, in terms of military effect, certainly the net beneficiaries of that, in terms of our armed forces and Israeli technology supplied to us. If we were to cease arms trade with Israel and they were to reciprocate, we would undoubtedly be the losers in that. ...

It is certainly my understanding, from media reports in recent years, that many British lives have been saved by Israeli intelligence, both here in the United Kingdom and in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. If an international dispute between the UK and Israel developed into Israel considering ceasing providing intelligence to us, I think we would be at a huge disadvantage, and potentially there would be a loss of British lives.

From my knowledge of the way that the Israeli Government and intelligence services

operate, I think that, even if there was a real breakdown in relations between Britain and Israel, it is highly unlikely that Israel would cut off intelligence sharing with the UK. Indeed, Israel shares very important intelligence even with a number of other countries around the world that are considered its enemies. ...

Q37 Lord Ricketts: ... I think it is uncomfortable to make the argument that we could not think of applying the criteria in our own arms export licensing because of concerns about reciprocal implications from the other country, but what Colonel Kemp says is just an example of the complexity of the decisions that Ministers have to make. ...

I endorse what you say about the importance of UK-Israeli intelligence co-operation. ...

Q38 Charlotte Nichols: ... Again, we come back to this discussion around what the UK can do versus what it should do. ...

Q39 Charlotte Nichols: ... the discussion has been about whether the UK is obliged to suspend arms sales ... I suppose the counterargument is that we are not obliged to trade with Israel, either. ...

Natasha Hausdorff: The UKLFI response dealt with the question of a legal obligation, because what the first letter had put forward to the Prime Minister was that the UK had a legal obligation to suspend. ...

It then comes to a consideration of all the issues that have been addressed so far in relation to supporting a war that Israel is fighting against Iranian proxies. The UK has done so not just in the context of the arms that it has been exporting ... but in the context of what we saw the RAF doing when it was deployed to defend Israel against Iran's direct strikes some two weeks ago. All this certainly comes into play, because it is important to factor in that this is a war that Israel is fighting against Iranian proxies not just on its own behalf, but on behalf of western liberal democracies like the United Kingdom and the United States.

The aid package ... which was passed by an enormous majority yesterday in Congress, is also indicative that the United States recognises ... the position adopted has been robustly to support Israel: not just fighting the genocide referenced earlier, but fighting on our behalves, because Iran and its proxies make it clear that while they are starting with Israel, they don't intend to end there. ...

Q40 Lord Ricketts: I think the debate we have had for the last two hours shows the difficulty of using arms export licences as a political tool or a "strategic" tool ... In the end, it is essentially a political judgment made on the basis of legal evidence, and I think it is best to leave it like that. ...

Q41 Lord Sumption: The obligation, legally, is to do what we can. That undoubtedly leaves a margin of judgment to the UK as to what the best way of doing that is, but it is clear that they are obliged to do something. ...

Q42 Antony Higginbotham (Conservative): ... Andy McDonald mentioned earlier that the F-35 has component parts made here in the UK, and we were talking about the difficulties that we would have if we were to try to extrapolate from that end use. ... Is there a danger that, if we go down that route and apply more discretion, rather than the published criteria, we become a less reliable partner when we are trying to come up with international consortia to do some of these things that we just cannot do on our own?

Lord Ricketts: I think you raise a very important point, because as arms become more and more complex and expensive, it will be the case more and more that they are produced by consortia of countries. ... I would not want to see the UK routinely taking a different position from its allies on how weapons that include UK components could be used. ...

Therefore, I think that you are right to highlight the point, but if you are going to join a consortium of countries to manufacture an advanced weapon, you have to have confidence in your partners' arms-export policies, so that you do not find that arms including some of your components have been delivered to countries whose human rights records or international humanitarian law records are bad. ...

Q43 Lord Ricketts: The allies that we work with on the major weapons systems tend to

be either the US or some combination of European countries—the French, the Germans, the Italians—for fighter aircraft, and I think that, in practice, it has largely been the case that we have had a similar approach to who we are willing to supply those arms to. Germany had a lower tolerance, particularly for Saudi Arabia, but the UK and France have tended to see very much eye to eye. ...

Q44 Antony Higginbotham: ... earlier this month, we saw a direct attack from Iran on the state of Israel. I am going to ask each of you whether it has changed your positions ... I am particularly mindful of the comments that the Foreign Secretary made a couple of weeks ago, where he said that imposing an arms embargo on Israel would have looked “ridiculous” in the light of the Iran attack. ...

Lord Ricketts: I do not think it has changed my mind, no. I still think it is right that we should apply the criteria we have set out rigorously. I do not personally think it is ridiculous to have taken that position in the light of the concerns that I and others have expressed in Gaza and then find that, when Israel was attacked—the UK had capabilities in the region. We were part of an existing operation overflying Iraq and Syria—Operation Shader—we were in a position to support Israel in its right of self-defence and we did so. I do not find those two positions incompatible at all ...

Lord Sumption: Neither do I. The Iran attack has not made any difference to the views that I signed up to in that letter, essentially because I do not think anybody denies the right of Israel to take steps for its own protection. The problem is the methods and the indiscriminate quality of the way that they have responded. ...

Natasha Hausdorff: It is very interesting that we have seen such a focus on 330 drones, cruise and ballistic missiles launched directly at Israel last week, but the 12,000 rockets fired at Israel over the last six months have seemingly escaped public notice. That is 9,100 from Gaza targeting civilians in Israel, 3,100 from Lebanon by Hezbollah targeting civilians in Israel and 35 from Syria, all targeting civilians in Israel. So no, the Iran strike has certainly not changed the opinion, I think, of those who have been aware for a long time of the Iranian regime’s genocidal intent to destroy Israel. ...

Q45 Antony Higginbotham: ... If there were not an export of radar components, would it have made a difference?

Richard Kemp: A key element of repulsing that attack was detection of the missiles in the air, which enabled British, American, French and Jordanian, as well as Israeli, countermeasures against it. I do not know whether our specific radar components were used, but they will have almost certainly made a contribution ... The same goes for our components that we provide for the F-35 aircraft that were used by the Israelis both in repulsing the attack and, as I understand it, in making their very limited reply to that attack. One thing that we might want to observe is that our participation, both in providing components and in flying RAF aircraft in defence of Israel, was noted by not only Israel but the Arab countries in the region. I think our standing would have increased among Arab nations as a result of that, because they have a deep fear of Iran as well as fear of Hamas. ...

Chair: That concludes this panel. ...

Today we had hoped that we would be able to hear from Ministers in the Department for Business and Trade and the Foreign Office. As the Committee knows, we invited Ministers 20 days ago, and this was the first hearing after recess that we were asking Ministers to come and join us for. We did not hear from Ministers over the course of Easter. We therefore chased both Departments last week and received a reply on Friday that they were not able to be with us today despite 20 days’ notice. ...

There are a number of questions that have emerged from our evidence that we would have put to Ministers. For example, how do Ministers interpret the ICJ’s rulings on plausibility, and what would the implications be for strategic export controls? What is both the evidence and the reasoning behind the judgments that have been made about whether Israel has

the intent and capacity to comply with international humanitarian law? The last legal assessment, as we heard, appears to have been at some point in December ...

We do not know whether Ministers are aware of negligence, of patterns of noncompliance or of a lack of commitment that might undermine the judgments that they have made. We do not know what examples they have considered, and we do not know what examples they have dismissed in their reasoning. We are not clear about who is among the decision takers, and we do not quite know what role is played by the Attorney General or No. 10. We do not know yet definitively whether we can see the legal advice. ...

Those would have been the questions that we would have put to Ministers among others, but they are not with us today. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14674/html/>

The International Court of Justice provisional findings ('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>

The letter referred to above that was signed by Lord Sumption can be read at
<https://lawyersletter.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Gaza-letter-FIN-3-April.pdf>

The Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at
https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

The UK Lawyers for Israel letter referred to above can be read at
<https://www.uklfi.com/top-lawyers-tell-rishi-sunak-reject-calls-to-halt-arm-sales-to-israel>

Information about the International Court of Justice case brought by Nicaragua against Germany, referred to above by Natasha Hausdorff, can be read at
<https://www.icj-cij.org/case/193>

The Campaign Against Arms Trade judgement, referred to above, can be read at
https://assets.caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ewhc/admin/2023/1343/ewhc_admin_2023_1343.pdf

The court papers referred to above by Andy McDonald, for a hearing in which Judge Jonathan Swift ruled that the High Court would hear a case later this year relating to arms sales to Israel, are not currently available online.

The Geneva Convention, referred to above, can be read at
https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf

UK Parliament House of Commons Library Briefing

Israel-Iran April 2024: UK and international response

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10002/CBP-10002.pdf>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Joint statement calling for the release of all hostages in Gaza

Joint Statement from the leaders of the United Kingdom, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Thailand and the United States, calling for the release of the hostages held in Gaza:

We call for the immediate release of all hostages held by Hamas in Gaza for over 200 days. They include our own citizens. The fate of the hostages and the civilian population

in Gaza, who are protected under international law, is of international concern. We emphasize that the deal on the table to release the hostages would bring an immediate and prolonged ceasefire in Gaza, that would facilitate a surge of additional necessary humanitarian assistance to be delivered throughout Gaza, and lead to the credible end of hostilities. Gazans would be able to return to their homes and their lands with preparations beforehand to ensure shelter and humanitarian provisions.

We strongly support the ongoing mediation efforts in order to bring our people home. We reiterate our call on Hamas to release the hostages, and let us end this crisis so that collectively we can focus our efforts on bringing peace and stability to the region.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-calling-for-the-release-of-all-hostages-in-gaza>

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office 200 days have passed since Hamas killed and took hostage civilians from Israel. Today, we are reminded of the plight faced by the families of victims and hostages since October 7. We call for Hamas to release hostages immediately. [plus video]

<https://twitter.com/FCDOGovUK/status/1782704587763225053>

David Cameron 200 days ago, Hamas carried out the deadliest attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. 200 days on, hostages remain in captivity, and their loved ones continue to face unimaginable suffering. Today we call on Hamas again – send the hostages home.

https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1782690618805809554

Palestinian civilians in Gaza are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. More than 200 days on and Hamas continues to hold hostages. Palestinian civilians in Gaza are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis and face the risk of famine.

The UK is joining USG Kaag's important efforts to prevent this situation deteriorating even further. We trebled our aid commitment in the last financial year and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air - and to contribute to the paradigm shift that you mentioned.

I want to highlight three areas.

First, we welcome Israel's commitment to increase aid flows into Gaza. For example, the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez checkpoint and extending the opening hours of the Kerem Shalom crossing. We now need to see more implementation. There has been some welcome progress in this regard, but much more needs to be done. Our Foreign Secretary reiterated this to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on his visit to Israel last week.

Second, as well as getting more aid in, it needs to be the right aid.

That is why resolution 2720 is so important. The UK fully supports Sigrid Kaag's mandate to establish a database and mechanism to track, verify and coordinate aid. The UK has provided expert technical support to help delivery of this mandate. And the UK will be providing over \$3.5 million of additional funding for equipment to support the UN and aid agencies get more aid into Gaza.

Third, once humanitarian aid arrives in Gaza, it is vital that it can be distributed quickly and effectively. We are calling on Israel to improve deconfliction and to allow UN agencies and humanitarian actors unhindered and safe access into and throughout Gaza, and to enable

the UN's minimum operating requirements fully. The tragic deaths of 7 World Central Kitchen workers, including three British citizens, demonstrates the need for action. President, the UK recognises that UNRWA is critical to aid delivery in Gaza. We were appalled by the allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attacks against Israel and we note the ongoing UN Office for Internal Oversight Services investigation into these allegations.

We are grateful for the independent review into UNRWA neutrality led by Catherine Colonna, and we will set out our position on future funding to UNRWA following careful consideration of the final report and UNRWA's response.

President, the UK remains resolved to working with international partners to urgently secure an immediate pause to get aid in and the hostages out, and then to work for a sustainable, permanent ceasefire without a return to fighting and loss of life.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/palestinian-civilians-in-gaza-are-facing-a-devastating-and-growing-humanitarian-crisis-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

UNSCR 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

Conflict-related sexual violence is not an inevitable consequence of war: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... President, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is not an inevitable consequence of war. The UK remains committed to tackling CRSV. ...

... in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we condemn all allegations and reports of CRSV. We call for thorough investigations and a survivor-centred approach, and for hostages to be released immediately, and for detainees to be treated with dignity and in line with humanitarian international law. ...

We call for Council members to implement the recommendations of this report to play their part to end these abhorrent acts and to end impunity for them, once and for all.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/conflict-related-sexual-violence-is-not-an-inevitable-consequence-of-war-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

Ministry of Defence

Ministry of Defence Today, the UK conducted its 9th airdrop of humanitarian aid for Gaza. The @RoyalAirForce delivered more than 11 tonnes of life-saving supplies. We're continuing to step up deliveries of aid by land and air to the people of Gaza who are in need of our support. [plus photos]

<https://twitter.com/DefenceHQ/status/1783528554040365315>

Welsh Senedd Petitions Committee

Jack Sargeant (Labour): Item 3.7, P-06-1387, 'Provide humanitarian aid to Gaza'.

This was submitted by Sam Swash, with 1,795 signatures. ...

Peredur Owen Griffiths (Plaid Cymru): ... All our hearts break at what's happening in Gaza and beyond following the atrocious Hamas attack on 7 October, and everything that's followed on since then; it has been absolutely devastating in the area. I've been working quite closely with different groups on responding to the ongoing war in Gaza and calling for a ceasefire as —well, a ceasefire now. That's what we need to be able to get

humanitarian aid into Gaza, and I think it would be premature to close this petition down before we get a chance to do that. I think the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal will be forthcoming once a ceasefire is in place, and hopefully that will be very, very soon. But I think this needs to be in our consciousness, and it needs to be in our thoughts and prayers that what's going on there is horrendous. And we need to keep it highlighted so that we don't forget what's going on. We need to get humanitarian aid in as soon as possible, as soon as we get a ceasefire. Every voice needs to be chiming to do that, and a ceasefire means a ceasefire in all parts, on all sides. I'll leave it there, Chair, but I wouldn't want to close this petition until there's an DEC appeal in place. I know that the Government has said that they would be willing to support a DEC appeal, or at least consider it. I know other Governments in the UK have already given aid in different formats.

The other point that we need to bear in mind—and it's not part of this petition in particular—is that we need to be mindful of all those Welsh citizens who have been affected by this. We heard from people whose daughter and granddaughters were living in Israel and part of the Jewish community that was attacked by Hamas on 7 October, and the son-in-law is still a hostage. They are going through grief because the daughters and granddaughters were killed. Also, in the Muslim communities, and in all other communities, people have been affected. So, I think we need to impress upon the Government that they need to be offering help to all those families affected, with bereavement counselling, with all sorts of different aspects. So, this is something that is very poignant at the moment and we need to keep the pressure up on the Government, and all Governments, to bring a resolution to what's happening in Gaza.

Jack Sargeant: I can see Members agree. ...

<https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/13871#C582905>

The petition referred to above can be read at

<https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/245909>

United Nations

Independent review panel releases final report on UNRWA

“Israel made public claims that a significant number of UNRWA employees are members of terrorist organisations. However, Israel has yet to provide supporting evidence of this,” according to the 54-page final report, *Independent review of mechanisms and procedures to ensure adherence by UNRWA to the humanitarian principle of neutrality*. ...

The much-awaited final report found that UNRWA, established by the General Assembly in 1949, has extensive tools in place to ensure it remains unbiased in its work and routinely provides Israel with employee lists and “the Israeli Government has not informed UNRWA of any concerns relating to any UNRWA staff based on these staff lists since 2011.”

“The set of rules and the mechanisms and procedures in place [at UNRWA] are the most elaborate within the UN system, precisely because it is such a difficult issue to work in such a complex and sensitive environment,” Catherine Colonna, former French foreign minister and head of the review group, told journalists ... “What needs to be improved will be improved. ...

Strongly encouraging “the international community to work side by side with the agency so it can perform its mission and overcome the challenges when they are there”, she said “this is the purpose of the review.”

In its nine-week-long review of existing mechanisms, the group conducted more than 200 interviews, met with Israeli and Palestinian authorities and directly contacted 47 countries and organisations, presenting a set of 50 recommendations on issues ranging from education to fresh vetting processes for recruiting staff.

The report’s recommendations include creating a centralised “neutrality investigations

unit”, rolling out an updated Code of Ethics and associated training to all staff, and identifying and implementing additional ways to screen UNRWA applicants at an early stage of the recruitment process.

The report also suggested exploring the possibility of third-party monitoring for sensitive projects and establishing a framework with interested donors to ensure transparency. ...

According to the review group’s final report, Israel’s claims against UNRWA triggered the suspension of funding amounting to around \$450 million.

The direct impact of Israel’s allegations swiftly hobbled UNRWA’s ability to continue its work. Operating solely on voluntary donations, UNRWA saw major donors, including the United States, cancelling or suspending funds for the agency. ...

The new report recommended increasing the frequency and strengthening the transparency of UNRWA’s communication with donors on its financial situation and on neutrality allegations and breaches. ...

The review group said UNRWA “has consistently worked on ensuring neutrality in education” as it provides elementary and preparatory education for 500,000 pupils in 706 schools with 20,000 educational staff, including in Gaza, where right now all children are out of school following attacks [destroying the enclave’s education system](#) amid the ongoing conflict.

Investigating “sustained criticism, mainly from Israel”, about the alleged presence of hate speech, incitement to violence and anti-Semitism in Palestinian Authority educational material, the review group examined three major international assessments and studies.

The new report showed that two identified bias and non-compliant content, but did not provide evidence of anti-Semitic reference. A third, the Eckert report, identified two examples that displayed anti-Semitic content, but noted that one had already been removed and the other significantly altered. ...

The report stated that “in the absence of a political solution between Israel and the Palestinians, UNRWA remains pivotal in providing lifesaving humanitarian aid and essential social services, particularly in health and education, to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the West Bank” and is “irreplaceable and indispensable to Palestinians’ human and economic development”. ...

“Moving forward, the Secretary-General appeals to all stakeholders to actively support UNRWA, as it is a lifeline for Palestine refugees in the region,” he said.

Other top UN officials have voiced strong support for the agency, calling on donors to reverse funding cuts and allow UNRWA to perform its work, especially in Gaza. ...

Following Israel’s allegations against UNRWA in late January, the UN agency immediately fired the staff members in question and requested a swift, impartial investigation. The UN chief ordered two.

Days later, the Secretary-General [appointed an independent review team](#), led by Ms. Colonna and researched by Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden, the Michelsen Institute in Norway and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, to investigate the UNRWA’s process of ensuring neutrality in its work.

At the same time, the UN chief ordered the UN’s top watchdog, the Office of Internal Oversight (OIOS), to investigate the veracity of Israel’s claims against the 12 UNRWA staff members.

At [the outset](#), OIOS investigators reached out to Member States concerned, visited UNRWA headquarters in Jordan and reviewed initial information received by the agency from Israeli authorities and from a variety of sources, including that released through the media and other public outlets.

That investigation is ongoing.

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148821>

Final Report for the United Nations Secretary General: Independent Review of Mechanisms and Procedures to Ensure Adherence by UNRWA to the Humanitarian Principle of Neutrality

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2024/04/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf

Independent Review of UNRWA - Press Conference (video)

<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1e/k1erh5lvog>

Accepting Recommendations of Independent Review Group on Palestine Refugee Agency, Secretary-General Commits to Establish Action Plan for Implementation

... The Secretary-General expresses his gratitude and appreciation to Catherine Colonna, who, on Saturday, submitted to him her Final Report as Chair of the Independent Review Group on the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), entitled “Independent review of mechanisms and procedures to ensure adherence by UNRWA to the humanitarian principle of neutrality”.

The Secretary-General is also grateful to the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, the Chr. Michelsen Institute and the Danish Institute for Human Rights for the essential research that they conducted.

The Secretary-General accepts the recommendations contained in Ms. Colonna’s report. He has agreed with Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini that UNRWA, with the Secretary-General’s support, will establish an action plan to implement the recommendations contained in the Final Report.

In this regard, the Secretary-General counts on the cooperation of the donor community, the host countries and the staff to fully cooperate in the implementation of the recommendations. Moving forward, the Secretary-General appeals to all stakeholders to actively support UNRWA, as it is a lifeline for Palestine refugees in the region.

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22199.doc.htm>

Mass graves in Gaza show victims’ hands were tied, says UN rights office

Disturbing reports continue to emerge about mass graves in Gaza in which Palestinian victims were reportedly found stripped naked with their hands tied, prompting renewed concerns about possible war crimes amid ongoing Israeli airstrikes ...

The development follows the recovery of hundreds of bodies “buried deep in the ground and covered with waste” over the weekend at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, central Gaza, and at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City in the north. A total of 283 bodies were recovered at Nasser Hospital, of which 42 were identified.

“Among the deceased were allegedly older people, women and wounded, while others were found tied with their hands...tied and stripped of their clothes,” said Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Citing the local health authorities in Gaza, Ms. Shamdasani added that more bodies had been found at Al-Shifa Hospital. ...

“Reports suggest that there were 30 Palestinian bodies buried in two graves in the courtyard of Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City; one in front of the emergency building and the others in front of the dialysis building,” Ms. Shamdasani told journalists in Geneva.

The bodies of 12 Palestinians have now been identified from these locations at Al-Shifa, the OHCHR spokesperson continued, but identification has not yet been possible for the remaining individuals.

“There are reports that the hands of some of these bodies were also tied,” Ms. Shamdasani said, adding that there could be “many more” victims, “despite the claim by the Israeli Defense Forces to have killed 200 Palestinians during the Al-Shifa medical complex operation”. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148876>

‘Every Day Counts,’ Senior Coordinator for Gaza Aid Tells Security Council, Urging Comprehensive Support with Commensurate Investment to Alleviate Suffering

... **Sigrid Kaag, Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza**, said that a paradigm shift is needed to meet the immense needs of Gaza’s civilian population. This requires a scale-up in assistance and distribution; irreversible steps to enable safe, secure and unhindered delivery inside Gaza; and timely preparation for early recovery and reconstruction. Reporting that health infrastructure in Gaza has been decimated, she said that the few hospitals still standing struggle to operate due to severe shortages of supplies and frequent power outages. As summer draws near and temperatures rise, communicable diseases threaten to sweep through Gaza. Children, who suffer the worst and the most in every crisis, are deprived of nutrition, protection and education and their futures hang in the balance, she said, noting that the efficacy of humanitarian operations cannot be determined by counting trucks. ...

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is pivotal in providing life-saving humanitarian aid and essential social services to Palestine refugees, she went on to say. “As such, UNRWA is irreplaceable and indispensable as a humanitarian lifeline and must be allowed to deliver on its mandate,” she stressed. She also reported that Israel has made several commitments to improve aid delivery, and that a number of steps have been taken to this end. These include an increase in the volume of aid cleared, inspected and crossed into Gaza; the temporary opening of the Erez Crossing and the Port of Ashdod for humanitarian goods, an increase in the number of trucks entering Gaza directly from Jordan, an expansion of the operating hours of the Kerem Shalom and Nitzana border crossings, the resumption of operations by some bakeries in north and central Gaza and the repair of the Nahal Oz waterline. However, further steps are needed to enable the sustained flow of humanitarian and commercial goods into Gaza in terms of volume, need and reach. ...

... On the Cyprus maritime corridor, she said that — while it can never be a substitute for land deliveries — it can provide additional resources. Efforts to build a floating port and pier on the shores of Gaza are advancing, she added. She also said that a database and notification system will go online for all cargo destined for Gaza along supply routes, stating that its operationalization will allow for pipeline prioritization, predictability, visibility and tracking of these supplies. ...

The representative of the United Kingdom, while welcoming Israel’s commitment to increase aid flows into Gaza, stressed that “much more needs to be done”. ... It is also vital that this aid is distributed quickly and effectively — to this end, Israel must improve deconfliction and allow UN agencies and humanitarian actors unhindered and safe access into and throughout Gaza. Recognizing that UNRWA is critical to aid delivery in Gaza, she commended the independent review of the Agency’s neutrality and noted that London will determine its future funding following careful consideration of the final report and the Agency’s response. ... [\[click here to read this speech in full\]](#)

The representative of the United States said that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is “beyond dire” and that his country has called on Israel to take a series of specific, concrete and measurable steps to address this crisis, protect civilians and ensure the safety of aid workers. ... “As Gaza faces imminent famine, lives hang in the balance and every day

matters,” he said, adding that the United States and its partners are working to establish a maritime corridor to Gaza and calling on Israel to open Ashdod to humanitarian shipments. ...

The representative of the Russian Federation ... stressed that the Council has a logical algorithm for its actions in conflicts — first, a demand for a ceasefire; second, monitoring for compliance; then, in case of violations, the question of enforcement arises. In Gaza, however, “this entire sequence of events has been turned upside down”, he said, adding that “humanitarian aid workers have, in essence, been asked to sacrifice their lives by doing the jobs of peacekeepers”. ...

The representative of Switzerland urged the parties to fully implement the binding resolutions the Council has adopted since the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks. ... Further, a large-scale military offensive in Rafah is unacceptable, as it would further hurt a civilian population already impacted by displacement, hostilities, epidemics and famine. The use of starvation as a method of warfare is strictly prohibited by international humanitarian law and constitutes a war crime, she stated, urging the immediate implementation of relevant Council resolutions, a ceasefire, the safe, swift and unimpeded delivery of aid to Gaza and the release of hostages. ...

The representative of France said that Palestinians in Gaza are not just exposed to the risk of famine; rather, “famine is upon them”. In that context, the effectiveness of humanitarian aid is a major concern. “It’s not a question of counting the number of trucks”, but a matter of ensuring that these trucks are loaded with the necessary cargo, he said. Hampering the provision of such relief could constitute a crime under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. ...

The representative of Israel detailed several steps his country has taken to improve the delivery of aid to Gaza, which have dramatically increased the volume of aid over the last several months. In recent weeks, Israeli authorities have inspected and granted access to between 300 to 400 trucks carrying aid and essentials. Since 7 October 2023, over 25,000 trucks carrying almost 500,000 tons of aid have been given access to the Gaza Strip, and the flow has meaningfully increased over recent weeks thanks to Israeli authorities’ ongoing efforts. The establishment of vital infrastructure is also under way, he said, noting that 25 bakeries are currently operational in Gaza, providing over 3 million units of bread, rolls and pizza daily.

“These steps — and others — were all made possible through the commitment of the Israeli authorities to the humanitarian efforts, as well as our coordination and joint work with different partners in the region and beyond,” he stated. Noting recent bottlenecks on the Gaza side of the crossing, he said that the United Nations must find solutions to this logistical gap and extend its hours of operation. Regarding the 193 Israeli and other hostages still held by Hamas and other terrorist groups, he called on the Council to step up its own efforts and demand that this horror finally ends. “We are here to remind all that these hostages have not been allowed any basic humanitarian assistance by their monstrous terrorist kidnappers,” he said. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15679.doc.htm>

New, Comprehensive Approach Key to Address Syria’s Political, Humanitarian Challenges, UN Special Envoy Tells Security Council, Citing Dangerous Spiral of Recent Events

Geir O. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, warned that “the grim spectre of regional conflict loomed over Syria once again”, citing the “dangerous and escalatory spiral” of recent events, such as the 1 April strikes on Iranian diplomatic premises in Damascus widely attributed to Israel, Iran’s 13 April strikes on Israel, further

attacks on 19 April presumed to be carried out by Israel in Iran, Iraq and Syria, as well as reported attacks on United States bases in north-east Syria attributed to Iraqi armed groups that some claim are linked to Iran. “I have long warned that Syria is treated by many as a sort of free-for-all space for settling scores,” he said, expressing concern about these regional spillover effects and the grave dangers of miscalculation and escalation. “We need regional de-escalation, starting with an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza,” he asserted, urging all players to exercise maximum restraint and respect international law. ...

Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of the Coordination Division, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ... said that events recent weeks have provided a stark reminder of the threat of expanding regional conflict with devastating implications for the people of Syria. ...

Funding for assistance to Palestinian refugees affected by the Syria crisis has also fallen dramatically in the past year, hindering the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)’s ability to provide emergency support to over 400,000 people. ...

The representative of Syria said the ongoing barbaric Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza has once again proven the hypocrisy of the West. He noted that Mr. Rajasingham mentioned the killing of a WFP team member in his earlier briefing. “He failed to mention that his killing came as a result of an Israeli aggression, an Israeli bombardment of the Syrian territories and that his death is similar to the killing by the occupation forces of more than 140 humanitarian workers in Gaza, with the support and arming and funding of the American Administration,” he said. Despite the challenges resulting from the Israeli aggression and the growing regional tension, the Syrian Government spares no efforts to improve the humanitarian situation and living conditions for its people, to provide basic services and the needed facilities for the return of the displaced. ...

The representative of Iran ... condemned “the cowardly terrorist attacks carried out by the Israeli regime on 1 April against our diplomatic premises in Damascus” and its acts of aggression against Syria, which he said continue with full impunity and without any reaction from the Security Council. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15680.doc.htm>

Security Council: Women and peace and security

Pramila Patten, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict , introducing the Secretary-General’s fifteenth annual report on conflict-related sexual ... said: “We meet at a time when the pursuit of peace and gender equality has once again become a radical act.” The existential task is to silence the guns and amplify the voices of women as a critical constituency for peace, she stressed, adding that the report provides a global snapshot of incidents and patterns of conflict-related sexual violence across 21 situations of concern. ... In the Middle East, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the ongoing bloodshed, displacement, trauma and terror: they are among the victims of Hamas’ 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel and comprise over half of the victims of the relentless bombing of Gaza....

This year’s report includes — for the first time — a dedicated section on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. ...

The representative of China strongly condemned all sexual violence against women and girls ... Turning to Gaza, he noted that over six months, more than 10,000 women have been killed and more 1 million Palestinian women and girls are facing starvation. “This man-made humanitarian disaster must end,” he said, adding it is imperative to promote

full, effective implementation of resolution 2728 (2024) to achieve an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and stop all actions that harm civilians. ...

The representative of the United Kingdom said that conflict-based sexual violence is an inevitable consequence of war. Her Government has prioritized this agenda through the leadership of the Prime Minister's Special Representative ... Further, in 2023, the United Kingdom established the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative ... [\[click here to read this speech in full\]](#)

The representative of France highlighted that the Secretary-General's annual report on conflict-related sexual violence now includes a section on Gaza and the West Bank. ...

The representative of Egypt welcomed that the Secretary-General's report included, for the first time, a section on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. "It is a long-overdue addition," he stressed, noting that the international community and the UN have turned a blind eye for years to allegations of violence, including sexual violence, committed by Israel against Palestinians. Recalling the Special Representative's official visit to Israel, he said that a full investigation of sexual violence in the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 attacks would be difficult while Israel's bombardment of civilians continues with impunity. Turning to the West Bank, he echoed the Secretary-General's call on Israel to grant immediate access to relevant UN bodies for a full investigation of all alleged violations, including those of conflict-related sexual violence. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15676.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))

Conflict-related sexual violence

pp14-15: Israel and the State of Palestine

<https://undocs.org/en/S/2024/292>

Amid campus crackdowns, Gaza war triggers freedom of expression crisis

"The Gaza crisis is truly becoming a global crisis of the freedom of expression," said Ms. Khan, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. ...

Demonstrations around the world have been roundly calling for an end to the war, which began in October following Hamas-led attacks on Israel that left 1,200 people dead and 250 taken hostage, 133 of who remain captive in Gaza.

Since then, Israeli military operations have killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the local health ministry, which now faces a man-made famine UN agencies have said stems from Israel's restrictions on aid deliveries.

In an exclusive interview on Wednesday, she told *UN News* the way academic freedom in the United States is being restricted is infringing on people's rights to protest over the ongoing war and occupation, including on campuses of such elite Ivy League schools as Colombia, Harvard and Yale universities.

"One after the another, the Ivy League heads of colleges and universities, their heads are rolling, they've been chopped off," she said. "That clearly polarises even further the political climate on this issue between 'them' and 'us'."

Pointing to a troubling rise in hate speech on both sides of the protests, she said that at the same time, people must be allowed to express their political views.

In many of these protests, she said there is a confusion between what is hate speech or incitement to violence and what is basically a different view of the situation in Israel and the occupied territories - or criticism of the way Israel is conducting the conflict. ...

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia must be prohibited, and hate speech violates international

law, she said. ...

“But, we must not mix that up with criticism of Israel as a political entity, as a State,” she said. “Criticising Israel is perfectly legitimate under international law.”

She said special rapporteurs have already detected a bias against pro-Palestinian supporters on social media.

“We need freedom of expression,” she said, adding that it is a fundamental right that is important for democracy, development, conflict resolution and building peace. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1149001>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Testimonies from the Occupied Palestinian Territory show new depths of Israel’s atrocities: UN expert

The Occupied Palestinian Territory is enveloped in a spiral of unstoppable violence, with stories Palestinians and other witnesses relay adding new depths to atrocities the world has witnessed since the beginning of Israel’s assault on Gaza over six months ago, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Francesca Albanese said today.

“The pace and intensity with which this violence has spread to the rest of the occupied territory confirms that no Palestinian is safe under Israel’s unfettered control,” Albanese said...

Albanese said her visit demonstrated that the situation in Gaza is worse than previously assessed, with serious and multi-layered long-term implications. Most victims she met had endured catastrophic injuries, witnessed family members killed and experienced the effects of Israel’s destruction of Gaza’s health infrastructure, even after 26 January 2024, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a [ruling](#) ordering Israel to prevent genocide in Gaza.

Patients that previously arrived in Egypt primarily with explosive and war injury-related symptoms are now joined by patients with chronic diseases and/or malnutrition, especially children, arising from Israel’s intentional humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

“Photos from a mere eight months ago show a chubby-cheeked 8-year-old Hamid, now rake thin and spending his days in excruciating pain due to pancreatitis developed through the harsh conditions of the siege,” the Special Rapporteur said.

“Those who have left Gaza come out fractured and wracked by ‘survivors’ guilt’ and severe trauma,” Albanese said. “Just 50 kilometers away from the Gaza Strip, crucial, life-sustaining aid and goods, including water desalination equipment, first aid kits, oxygen cylinders and portable toilets – paid for by taxpayers across the world – languish in warehouses, barred entry into Gaza on the pretext of use by combatants.”

“Humanitarian measures implemented so far – airdrops and maritime corridors – are a mere palliative for what is desperately needed and legally due,” the expert said. “These measures are grossly inadequate to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe that Israel’s assault has created.”

“At this point, Israel has reneged on its international obligations to a degree that warrants a call for sanctions,” Albanese said.

The Special Rapporteur said her visit only confirmed how critical the UN Relief and Works Agency’s mandate is to Palestinians and people across the region as Palestinians once more flee to safety.

“Surrounding countries cannot alone absorb the impact of Israel’s pernicious practices of killing and displacement from Gaza,” Albanese said, calling for the supply chain of support to be mainstreamed through the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. ...

Albanese reiterated calls for an immediate ceasefire, an end to Israel’s illegal control of

Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territory and a protective presence to ensure peace and stability in the region.

“It is critically important that the UN assumes full responsibility of humanitarian operations in accordance with Security Council resolution 2720,” the Special Rapporteur said.

“The horrors that people have seen in Gaza are unspeakable,” Albanese said. “But this visit also confirms that attention on the worsening situation in the West Bank including East Jerusalem has lapsed.” Increased restrictions and abuses, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings by Israeli soldiers and armed settlers alike are widely reported.

“Israeli policies spanning the occupied Palestinian territory are unquestionably endangering Palestinian existence on their land,” she said. “The focus of the international community must zero-in on the most likely implication – the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians – and States must do everything in their power to prevent it.” ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/testimonies-occupied-palestinian-territory-show-new-depths-israels>

UNSCR 2720, referred to above, can be read at

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720\(2023\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2720(2023))

UN Human Rights Chief deplores harrowing killings of children and women in Rafah

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk ... decried a series of Israeli strikes on Rafah in the past few days that killed mostly children and women, repeating his warning against a full-scale incursion on an area where 1.2 million civilians have been forcibly cornered.

Such an operation would lead to further breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, he said. It would risk more deaths, injuries and displacement on a large scale – even further atrocity crimes, for which those responsible would be held accountable. ...

“The latest images of a premature child taken from the womb of her dying mother, of the adjacent two houses where 15 children and five women were killed - this is beyond warfare.”

On 19 April, an apartment building was hit in Tal Al Sultan area in Rafah, killing nine Palestinians, including six children and two women. Another strike on two adjacent houses in At Tanour area in eastern Rafah on 20 April reportedly killed 20 Palestinians – 15 children and five women. A strike on As Shabora Camp in Rafah on the same day reportedly left four dead, including a girl and a pregnant woman. ...

“Every 10 minutes a child is killed or wounded. They are protected under the laws of war, and yet they are ones who are disproportionately paying the ultimate price in this war,” said Türk.

Türk said he was horrified by the destruction of An Nasser Medical Complex and Al Shifa Medical Complex and the reported discovery of mass graves in and around these locations. He called for independent, effective and transparent investigations into the deaths.

“Given the prevailing climate of impunity, this should include international investigators,” he added. “Hospitals are entitled to very special protection under international humanitarian law. And the intentional killing of civilians, detainees, and others who are hors de combat is a war crime.” ...

At the same time, Türk said grave human rights violations were continuing unabated in the occupied West Bank. Despite international condemnation of massive settler attacks from 12-14 April facilitated by the Israeli Security Forces (ISF), settler violence has continued with the support, protection, and participation of the ISF.

During a 50-hour long operation into Nur Shams refugee camp and Tulkarem city starting on 18 April, the ISF deployed ground troops, bulldozers and drones, and sealed the camp.

Fourteen Palestinians were killed, three of them children. Ten members of the ISF were hurt. The UN Human Rights Office received reports that several Palestinians were unlawfully killed and that the ISF used unarmed Palestinians to shield their forces from attack and killed others in apparent extrajudicial executions. Dozens were reportedly detained and ill-treated. The ISF inflicted unprecedented and apparently wanton destruction on the camp and its infrastructure.

On 20 April, the ISF or settlers shot and killed a 50-year-old Palestinian ambulance driver. The ambulance was evacuating two Palestinians injured by live ammunition during an attack by settlers, who were accompanied by the ISF, in As Sawiya, Nablus.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/un-human-rights-chief-deplores-harrowing-killings-children-and-women-rafah>

Israel: Withholding tax revenue and revoking banking waivers could paralyse Palestinian economy, UN experts warn

Unilaterally cutting off Palestinian banks from the global banking system would be a violation of the fundamental principles of international law, two UN experts warned ...after an Israeli Minister threatened to revoke a protection waiver issued annually to two banks in Israel that maintain connections to Palestinian financial institutions.

“Cutting off Palestinian banks from the global banking system unilaterally also violates the principle of sovereign equality of states, the principle of non-intervention into the domestic affairs of states, the principle of cooperation in good faith,” the experts said.

“The impossibility of bank transfers will affect all people of Palestine indiscriminately, exacerbate the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe, and affect all fundamental human rights, including the right to food, right to water and sanitation, right to health, freedom from torture and the right to life.”

The waiver, issued annually and signed by the Israeli Finance minister, protects Israeli banks from lawsuits involving the Palestinian Authority for ‘transferring funds to terror groups’. Without this protection, Israeli banks will be exposed to legal action, and can be expected to break ties with Palestinian banks. The waiver expired on 1 April 2024.

The Palestinian economy runs on the Israeli shekel and its financial dealings with the rest of the world must go through the Israeli banking system.

Isolating the Palestinian authority from the financial world will cripple the Palestinian economy, the experts warned, recalling that the protection waivers guaranteed under the Oslo and Paris Accords.

Since the 1990s peace accords, Israel has also collected tax revenue on behalf of Palestinians and transferred the funds to the Palestinian authority. A large portion of these funds is used for wage payments. Since 24 January 2024, the monthly tax revenue previously allocated to the Palestinian Authority’s public sector employees in Gaza has been transferred to a Norwegian-based trust account. However, the Norwegian fund cannot release the money to pay public sector employees in Gaza without Israel’s permission.

“Because a significant proportion of taxes in the Palestinian Authority’s budget collected by Israel, the Palestinian Authority is vulnerable to unilateral suspensions by Israel of transfers of clearance revenue, qualifying as unilateral coercive measures contrary to international law” the experts said.

The experts have established communication channels with the Israeli Government to address these concerns. They called for interim measures to prevent irreparable harm and potential breaches of international law.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/israel-withholding-tax-revenue-and-revoking-banking-waivers-could-paralyse>

The Independent Review on UNRWA adherence to the humanitarian principle of neutrality from Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA Commissioner General

“UNRWA welcomes the findings and recommendations of the independent review on the Agency’s adherence to the humanitarian principle of neutrality.

“UNRWA is firmly dedicated to applying UN values and humanitarian principles. The recommendations in this report will further strengthen our efforts and response during one of the most difficult moments in the history of the Palestinian people.

“The report confirms that UNRWA has established – over many years - policies, mechanisms and procedures to ensure compliance with the principle of neutrality. The report confirms that the Agency has systems to address allegations of neutrality breaches, including through disciplinary sanctions. It also confirms that between 2022 and 2024, the Agency reviewed all external allegations and opened investigations when evidence of misconduct was present.

“Safeguarding the neutrality of the Agency is central to our ability to continue saving lives and contributing to the human development of Palestine Refugees in the Gaza Strip as it faces an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, and in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

“The report recognizes the complexity of UNRWA’s mandate within a highly political context. It makes a series of recommendations that the Agency commits to act upon, namely in the areas relating to engagement with donors, governance, management and internal oversight, neutrality of staff and installations, education, staff unions and enhanced cooperation with UN Agencies.

“UNRWA commits to working on expanding internal oversight, and engage with partners, including donors, host countries, other UN agencies in constructive ways towards the common goal of increasing impact and adherence to humanitarian principles.

“UNRWA will continue to strive towards providing equitable and quality education, regularly reviewing and improving the content of its education programme to ensure that it adheres to values that contribute to peace, tolerance and human rights.

“UNRWA is developing an action plan, with a timeline and budget to take forward the report’s recommendations. Implementing some of the recommendations will require extensive engagement with staff and partners, including member states, hosts and donor countries. The Agency looks forward to cooperating with all concerned stakeholders to implement the recommendations.

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/independent-review-unrwa-adherence-humanitarian-principle-neutrality>

Nearly 2 million people depend on assistance from UNRWA as war in Gaza enters 200 days and violence increases in the West Bank

UNRWA is seeking US\$ 1.21 billion to address the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and respond to needs in the West Bank as violence increases. ...

“The scars of war are seen on a massive scale in Gaza. Meanwhile violence is increasing in the West Bank. It is critical to support UNRWA in providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance and development services in health and education. The past months proved that there is no replacement or alternative to UNRWA,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini.

As the largest humanitarian organisation in the Gaza Strip, UNRWA is the backbone of the aid operation there, managing shelters with more than 1 million people, distributing food, providing primary healthcare, and coordinating the logistics for the humanitarian deliveries. The priority for UNRWA is to bring in much needed supplies including food into Gaza where

the population has become almost entirely dependent on handouts and relief assistance. “This war should not become the new norm as we get into another sad milestone: 200 long days of brutality, loss, despair and anxiety. All efforts must be exerted to reach a long overdue ceasefire. Until then, much more support must come to UNRWA to allow us to respond to vast and growing humanitarian needs,” said Lazzarini.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/news-releases/nearly-2-million-people-depend-assistance-unrwa-war-gaza-enters-200-days>

Food Security Information Network

Global Report on Food Crises 2024

<https://www.fsinplatform.org/report/global-report-food-crises-2024/>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Committee Debate

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

col 4 **Fiona Bruce (Conservative):** ... The Bill is a shared enterprise. There has been a cross-party effort over many years for the fundamental and universal human right of freedom of religion or belief to be taken seriously, and for article 18 not to be “an orphaned right” ... Having the Prime Minister’s special envoy as a permanent fixture in statute will embed the progress that has been made, and make the UK a global leader on freedom of religion or belief, or FORB. ...

The object of the Bill is international freedom of religion or belief, but its subject is, of course, the Prime Minister’s special envoy for freedom of religion or belief. It puts the role on a statutory footing. Amendment 3, which is in my name, therefore adjusts the Bill’s short title so that it refers specifically to the role. Amendment 4, which is in my name, provides explicitly for the continuation in legislation of the role of the Prime Minister’s special envoy for freedom or religion or belief. ...

col 5 As the Committee will appreciate as much as I do, there is already such a role, which I have had the privilege of undertaking for over three years now, as the third incumbent. This short piece of legislation does not seek to create anything new, but gives the role the permanence proposed by recommendation 6 of the landmark review by the Bishop of Truro of the Foreign Office’s response to the persecution of Christians. ...

The Bill, if approved, provides for the continuation of the role of Prime Minister’s special envoy for freedom of religion or belief. ...

“The Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief: brings together UK efforts to promote religious tolerance abroad, and works on how the UK government can protect and promote this fundamental freedom internationally; works with the members of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance to raise awareness of cases of particular concern, advocating for the rights of people worldwide who are discriminated against or persecuted for their faith or belief: supports implementing the Bishop of Truro’s recommendations on Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) support for persecuted Christians around the world.

The Prime Minister’s Special Envoy undertakes these activities on behalf of, and reports to, the Prime Minister.”

I also confirm that I have always, in fulfilling this role, sought to advocate for and support

all those persecuted or discriminated against, of whatever faith or belief ...

col 6 In terms of technical changes, it is almost unprecedented for the Prime Minister to be referenced in legislation. While it is recognised that it is the Prime Minister who does and will appoint their special envoy, the legislative description required is “a Minister of the Crown”. ...

Further, the other drafting change from the original Bill is to avoid the ambiguity of the creation of a separate—that is, a new—office, distinct from the current office of the Prime Minister’s special envoy, which I have within the FCDO. ...

I trust the Minister will join me today in ensuring that the office of the Prime Minister’s special envoy will continue to be staffed by at least the two current positions of a private secretary and an assistant private secretary. The role and its relevance across every country of the world—apart from the UK, which is covered by a faith Minister—means it is a demanding one that requires resources. ...

col 7 ... religious persecution is widespread worldwide and it seems it is only getting worse. A Christian is killed every two hours somewhere in the world, antisemitism is on the rise, we see Uyghur and Rohingya Muslims being systematically persecuted, and in Iran followers of the Baha’i faith are victims of what Human Rights Watch has called “crimes against humanity”. I am interested in how the role of the special envoy could raise concerns, particularly within the FCDO, about persecution and discrimination and therefore try to prevent atrocities in future.

My second point was also raised by ...Catherine West on Second Reading. She asked how the Bill would “balance the other rights that may occasionally collide with this question of a special envoy for freedom of religion or belief?”—[\[Official Report, 26 January 2024; Vol. 744, c. 572.\]](#) ...

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Andrew Selous): ... I want to put on record the Church of England’s very strong support for this Bill and what it will do to protect the ability of people to practise their Christian faith around the world, but also to protect those of every faith, whether they are Jewish, Muslim or of any other faith, or of no faith and are persecuted. This Bill really matters because the situation globally has never been so bad and it continues to worsen. Those of us with the immense freedom to practise our faith or not practise any faith, as we enjoy in this country, have an absolute duty to speak out and give this Bill our wholehearted support.

col 9 **Lisa Cameron (Labour)** ... This role is exemplary, and people contact me from many different countries to commend the work that is being done, such as those who have been persecuted and those whose families have been persecuted. I think that it places the UK in a real leadership position in upholding article 18 of the UN charter, and it is very important internationally. ...

col 10 **Andrew Rosindell (Conservative):** My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton is a truly honourable Member of this House. She has shown courage and determination to stand up for freedom of religion, freedom of belief and freedom of speech, not only in this country but throughout the world. She has shown the vital importance of maintaining this role as a UK prime ministerial appointment ...

Throughout history, the United Kingdom has been a champion of freedom: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of worship and freedom to choose one’s own way of life. Throughout the Commonwealth, there is much work to be done. There are many countries that may have inherited our ancestry, our history and our heritage but they have not necessarily followed through in the way that they apply their laws. There is much work to be done to uphold those values of freedom, particularly freedom of religion. That is why the role should be permanent and why, from now on, all Prime Ministers should appoint someone to the role, so that there is always a person leading the fight to spread those values of freedom, including freedom of religion and belief ...

col 12 **The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

(Nusrat Ghani): ... I do not think I have ever been in a debate where there has been so much approval for a piece of legislation or so much love ... for a Member. ...

We have all expressed our gratitude to my hon. Friend, the current special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, and I pay tribute to her for the work she has done. She will be leaving behind a legacy, which is very rare for a parliamentarian.

I now turn to the Bill. Clause 1 requires the Prime Minister to appoint a special envoy for international freedom of religion or belief. Establishing that role permanently and in perpetuity was a recommendation in the Bishop of Truro's 2019 independent review into the work of the FCDO and the freedom of religion or belief, and our 2019 manifesto committed to its implementation. The clause also sets out the duties of the special envoy and requires them to report periodically to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will determine the terms and conditions of the appointment.

Clause 2 requires the Prime Minister to establish an office of the special envoy to support the work of the special envoy. Clause 3(1) provides that the Bill will come into force on the day it is passed, and clause 3(2) provides that it will extend to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

New clause 1(1) provides that: "There continues to be a special envoy called the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief."

Ensuring that the role continues to be known as the Prime Minister's special envoy will mean that it maintains its international authority and recognition, as hon. Members have said. The new clause also seeks to reduce the statutory duty on the Prime Minister to appoint and provide resources to the special envoy; the duty is delegated to a Minister of the Crown. That change is essential, as legislation relating to the Prime Minister's powers is extremely rare and limited, especially where the processes can be dealt with administratively. I thank the special envoy for her understanding on that point.

The new clause also clarifies the duties of the special envoy. It states: "The special envoy must act with a view to...promoting freedom of religion or belief abroad, in particular by working with the government of the United Kingdom, with other governments and their representatives...and with organisations outside government;...raising awareness of cases in which people abroad are persecuted or discriminated against on the grounds of religion or belief and advocating for the rights of such people." ...

col 14 In conclusion, the Bill reinforces our commitment to the position of special envoy for freedom of religion or belief. It will support the FCDO as we ensure that progress made on the freedom of religion or belief is embedded, and that the freedom of religion or belief is central to our wider human rights work. The role has only been established because of the sheer determination of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton.

Fiona Bruce: ... There is, of course, a range of envoys. The reason that the special envoy for FORB in particular is being put into statute is that doing so was a manifesto commitment. However, that does not in any way diminish the importance of the work of other envoys, nor the fact that the UK defends the full range of human rights ... Those rights are set out in the universal declaration of human rights and in international human rights treaties. ...

History has shown that, where freedom of religion or belief is under threat, other human rights are often also at risk. ... In supporting the Bill, I hope that the Government will be further enabled to positively contribute towards protecting not only FORB but other human rights across the world. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-24/debates/4113c0aa-9c90-4d9e-b233-c672e7e87ec1/InternationalFreedomOfReligionOrBeliefBill>

The Bishop of Truro's Review, referred to above, can be read at

<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

House of Commons Written Answers

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22108] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of proscribing the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation in the context of the recent military actions by Iran.

David Rutley: We have condemned in the strongest terms Iran's direct attack against Israel, which was a dangerous escalation. We do not routinely comment on any potential proscription decisions. We are deeply concerned by the threat from Iran, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and have taken significant measures to counter it at home and around the world. That includes sanctioning the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in its entirety and more than 400 Iranian individuals and entities, including dozens of IRGC commanders. We are confident that the police, security services and courts all have the tools they need to sanction, prosecute and mitigate the threats from Iran.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22108>

Middle East

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22098] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what recent assessment he has made of the impact of Iranian support for the Houthis on the stability of (a) Yemen and (b) the wider Middle East region.

David Rutley: The UK assesses that Iran has directly supported Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. Specifically, Iran has provided intelligence to enable Houthi targeting of vessels. Furthermore, Iran has supplied the Houthis with missiles and UAVs used to attack international shipping. Iran should cease such support and use its influence to restrain its proxies to prevent further escalations.

The UK continues to seek the de-escalation of tensions in the Middle East. We are employing the full range of our diplomatic and security efforts, working with allies and international partners to counter groups seeking to undermine the region's peace, stability and prosperity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22098>

Ghassan Abu Sittah

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [22020] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has made representations to his German counterpart on Germany's refusal to permit the entry of British-Palestinian surgeon Dr. Ghassan Abu Sittah.

Andrew Mitchell: I have not made representations on this matter.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22020>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK targets Iran's ability to launch drones through new round of sanctions

... The UK has today announced further sanctions targeting Iran's drone and missile industries.

The package, announced in coordination with the US and Canada, follows the regime's attack on 13 April, in which over 300 drones and missiles were fired at Israel.

It comes after an initial set of sanctions announced last Thursday (18 April) in reaction to Iran's drone attacks on Israel the previous weekend.

The UK is today sanctioning a further two individuals and four companies which are closely involved in Iran's network of drone production.

In addition, the UK has also announced its plan to expand trade sanctions against the

regime by introducing new bans on the export of components used in drone and missile production to Iran. These measures seek to deny Iran access to the components it needs to develop these weapons, limiting its military capabilities.

Foreign Secretary, David Cameron said: The Iranian regime's dangerous attack on Israel risked thousands of civilian casualties and wider escalation in the region.

Today the UK and our partners have sent a clear message – we will hold those responsible for Iran's destabilising behaviour to account.

Alongside our partners, we will continue to tighten the net on Iran's ability to develop and export these deadly weapons. ...

The UK already has over 400 sanctions imposed on Iran, including designations against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in its entirety and many of those responsible for the attack on Israel. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-targets-irans-ability-to-launch-drones-through-new-round-of-sanctions>

The previous announcement of sanctions, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-uk-and-us-sanction-leading-iranian-military-figures-and-entities-following-the-attack-on-israel>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Criminal Justice Bill

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

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

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

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

Committee Stage, House of Commons

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-24/debates/4113c0aa-9c90-4d9e-b233-c672e7e87ec1/InternationalFreedomOfReligionOrBeliefBill>

Amendment Paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0039/amend/international_day_pbc_0424.pdf

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

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator: Charity banking challenges survey 2024
(closing date 15 May 2024)

<https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/have-your-say-charity-banking-challenges-survey-2024/>

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