



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debates

Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience: Khan Review

col 64WH Jonathan Gullis (Conservative): That this House has considered the Khan Review on threats to social cohesion and democratic resilience. ...

In the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States and further afield, democracy sadly continues to be under threat. Elected representatives in this country are being threatened like never before. This year we have seen MPs from across the political divide intimidated and threatened by extremists intent on tearing apart our democratic framework. ...

Across the western world we have seen a shocking rise in antisemitism and anti-Jewish hate in the wake of the 7 October terrorist attacks committed by Hamas. In the UK specifically, the House of Commons Library notes that police forces in Manchester, Yorkshire, the west midlands and Merseyside reported an increase in antisemitism. I am horrified by reports that the Jewish community are scared to visit the capital city of this country and that Jewish schoolchildren are hiding badges on their school uniforms for fear of being discriminated against. ...

At a recent fundraising event for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire's Conservative police and crime commissioner candidate Ben Adams, protestors hijacked a local Conservative party dinner in Shelton. Some protestors were known to have been supporters of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which the Government have now rightly proscribed as a terrorist group. They

managed to enter the facility, threatening local activists and behaving aggressively in the presence of children of the attendees. That is a clear example of malign actors threatening social cohesion. ...

As the Khan review points out, “freedom-restricting harassment” is threatening social cohesion and testing our democracy like never before. ...

col 65WH The geopolitical environment has become increasingly unstable and unpredictable, which exacerbates the threat of social media to social cohesion. The tragic events of 7 October, when Hamas committed the worst pogrom since the holocaust, have presented us with an immense challenge.

On reading the Khan review, I was deeply concerned that the continuing activity of far-right and Islamist groups poses serious challenges to cohesion when they capitalise on the backdrop of geopolitical instability to stir division. These malign groups have sophisticated networks. Community spaces such as gyms are used as a recruiting ground, and vulnerable young people are targeted. ...

Far-right organisations play on people’s real concerns about the economic impacts of migration to make the case for their narrow-minded and nationalistic worldview. In the same way, radical Islamist groups will use fear to stoke up division in favour of their nihilistic worldview and argue that institutions set out to undermine minorities’ personal freedoms and individual liberties. Soaring immigration levels currently make it virtually impossible for people to properly integrate into British society, and with huge unrest in our streets we cannot build a more cohesive society built around British values like democracy, the rule of law, respect, tolerance and individual liberty ...

col 66WH Alongside the clear threat of far-right extremism, radical Islamist groups also have a footprint ... Given that 80% of counter-terrorism police networks’ live investigations are of Islamist terrorism, it is vital that we remain vigilant to the threat of other people who could be influenced by divisive and malign actors.

Earlier in the year, I welcomed the Home Secretary’s proscription of Hizb ut-Tahrir as a terrorist organisation. That vile antisemitic organisation encourages terrorism and praises the abhorrent terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October. ... Sadly, that heinous group seeks to use events in the middle east to argue against values that underpin the UK as the world’s most successful multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. ...

The Khan review makes it clear that the financial vulnerability of one in five councils across the UK means that “the potential impact on social cohesion in the short and long term could be destabilising to our country.” ...

The Khan review makes it clear that prevention is “far more effective than cure”.

Given the unprecedented threats posed to democracy and social resilience, I urge the Minister to ensure that Prevent is aware of the new challenges ...

col 67WH Jim Shannon (DUP): ... across the UK and indeed globally there are so many democracies and communities that face internal polarisation, so it is great that we can look at the Khan report and apply it to modern society, in order to assess what more can be done to ensure that all opinions are represented.

A large majority of the public—85%—believe that freedom-restricting harassment currently occurs in the UK, with 60% believing that the problem is worse than it was five years ago. I see a change in society and I am not quite sure whether covid was the main reason, but it was certainly part of it, when people were able to make comments at a distance, and interaction and social engagement were lost to a certain degree. Some 44% of people have witnessed freedom-restricting harassment online, and 44% say they have witnessed it in person, so there is something difficult in society. ...

col 68WH There is absolutely no doubt that social media plays a massive role in the opinions that are gathered and eventually expressed, which often provoke controversy in society, and there is no doubt that a conversation must be had regarding people’s disillusionment with democracy and about how we can restore confidence in it. ...

There are two main dimensions to social cohesion: the sense of belonging in a community

and the relationships with others in that community. ...

Everyone has the right to express their belief in a rational and respectful manner. In Northern Ireland, we recently discussed changes to the relationships and sex education curriculum. ... A meeting was held to inform and discuss the issue with those parents, and Eóin Tennyson MLA of the Alliance party summarised the Let Kids Be Kids campaign as a “disgusting dog-whistle to the far-right”—a disgraceful comment. We are not, and my constituents are not, on the far right. They are parents who have concerns about their children’s education and teaching, and care about our opinions. ...

I can assure the public that those who have such concerns are not far right. They are parents, they are carers, who are invested in protecting the innocence of children, as is their right. I would expect every parent to do that with zest and enthusiasm ... The fact that freedom of speech allows those people to be called far right shows how far wrong we have gone.

col 69WH The threat from extremism has been growing for many years, and what has been described as the pervasiveness of extremist ideology in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 has highlighted the need for further action. At the outbreak of the Israel-Palestine conflict, I received calls and emails to my office about an incident that occurred at the city hall in Belfast. ... it is an example of how evil and wicked some people are in their intentions. There were pictures and videos going around on social media of Lasair Dhearg activists—those of a nationalist opinion—projecting on to city hall an image of Hamas fighters paragliding into Israel, alongside the words “smash the Zionists”. ...

Some people displayed on the city hall the statement “From the river to the sea”. We all know what that means. That means death to Jewish people—death to Israeli people. That, I believe, is inflammatory; I believe that the police needed to take action. To be fair, the police did immediately take action, but the fact that it was allowed to happen in the first place—to the annoyance, the anger of many of my constituents who were in Belfast doing their shopping, and other people from my party as well—was outrageous. ...

col 70WH **Jack Brereton (Conservative):** ... It would be wonderful to say that Prevent’s job was done and dusted, but the reality is that there are those ... who reject our liberal, western, democratic values. Worst of all, there are those who have been prepared to act on their hatred by engaging in, or attempting to engage in, murderous terror. ...

Sadly, we have seen both Islamic extremism and far-right extremism ... Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun have been active in some communities ... radicalising young people and attempting to spread their perverse view of religion. That is why it is welcome to see the Government take action recently to proscribe Hizb ut-Tahrir ...

Concerningly, we have seen attempts from extremist groups to undermine and control our democratic systems. Cases have been reported of Islamic extremists attempting to discourage participation and interfere with elections. ...

col 71WH I know that Dame Sara has expressed concern about the mainstreaming of extremism. There are concerns that engaging with extremist groups or individuals gives them legitimacy. She also highlighted a number of serious concerns about freedom-restricting harassment. It is particularly concerning that the report suggests that this problem is getting worse, stating that 60% of people feel that the problem is worse than it was five years ago.

I would like also to see more of a focus on what, for want of a better turn of phrase, I am going to call “extreming of the mainstream”. ... we see the alienation of hard-working, patriotic communities. It is not extreme to want to hear “Rule, Britannia” at the Last Night of the Proms, or to sing it when and wherever you like in the UK. It is not extreme to fly the St George’s cross or to have an England flag tattoo. Rather, it is extreme to want to ban “Rule, Britannia”. It is extreme to want to ban the flag of England. And yet we all know that there are attempts to chip, chip away at our shared icons, heroes and ways of life.

... the UK is one of the most open, multicultural and freedom-loving countries in the world.

The rule of law, religious freedom and free speech are some of our core democratic British values. However, we cannot take these values for granted, especially at a time when we see these values under increasing threat around the world. Democracy is fragile. We must redouble our efforts to protect our shared values and democratic rights, and we must see robust action against those who threaten to undermine or suppress our way of life ...

col 72WH **Naz Shah (Labour):** ... The rampant spread of dangerous conspiracy theories and disinformation, alongside unregulated technological advances in artificial intelligence, pose a direct threat to our democratic ability and stability. Additionally, as we have seen in more recent times, politics and politicians at large, across the globe, have utilised populism to boost their own political gains at the expense of minority communities and those on the receiving end of their political attacks.

The Khan review uncovers a phenomenon of freedom-restricting harassment, where individuals are coerced into self-censorship through abuse and intimidation. That harassment is reported as suppressing the freedom of expression of individuals. Eighty-five per cent of the public acknowledge its presence in the UK and 60% perceive it to be worsening over the years. The report highlights a link between the erosion of democratic resilience and the absence of a national strategic framework.

The recommendations in the report for protecting victims of harassment and incitement are welcome and to be encouraged, as is the recommendation for a new independent office for social cohesion that genuinely works, in good faith, to balance the rights and freedoms of all with the need for social cohesion across the United Kingdom. In addition, schools should be safe havens for learning, free from intimidation. I therefore also support the review's proposal for buffer zones around schools, to curb protests and provide support for staff and students. However, while aspects of the report are welcome, it completely ignores the role that the Government are playing in breaking down social cohesion in this country.

The recent statement by the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, on a proposed new definition of extremism is concerning, particularly due to the approach that he presents, which targets Muslim groups. On one hand, the Government acknowledge there is a problem with social cohesion and people policing their ideas and opinions. On the other hand, we have a Secretary of State targeting Muslim organisations and dangerously labelling them as extremists without an evidence-based approach or any right to appeal. In addition, the Secretary of State fuelled speculation in the media that he would label the Muslim Council of Britain as an extremist organisation. He also took away funding from the Inter Faith Network and its work because a member of its board was linked to the Muslim Council of Britain. The irony is that an interfaith charity that champions the work of social cohesion had to close down because the Government ended its funding—the same Government who acknowledge we have an issue with social cohesion.

col 73WH It gets worse. The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology used her position to target a professor over her support for Palestine by wrongfully accusing her of extremism. The result was the taxpayer footing a bill for £34,000 to pay for the price of the right hon. Lady's libellous attack. Let us not forget that a former Home Secretary tried to silence hundreds of thousands of genuine people demonstrating for a ceasefire in Palestine by labelling the protests as "hate marches". ...

Susan Hall is actively involved in Facebook groups sharing antisemitic, white supremacist content and racially charged threats against Sadiq Khan. That is the Tory mayoral candidate for London. The election is only a few days away, yet the Government want to lecture people on social cohesion and the impact it has on society, and the Tory candidate for London epitomises the very definition of divisiveness. ...

When we talk about community cohesion, there are vulnerabilities that Dame Sara Khan references—the issues of job security, and the issues that make communities feel threatened, and people feel otherised. These issues require people to know that they matter, that they belong, and that people care. Instead, what we have is senior people like

the former Home Secretary and the former Prime Minister who compared women to letterboxes and other things. As a result of his column, there has been a 335% increase in attacks against Muslims. ...

col 74WH Social cohesion is imperative for Great Britain, but that means leadership, and calling out people like the former Prime Minister who rubbed shoulders in America with Steve Bannon, who said, "Tommy Robinson is our hero". ...

Liz Twist (Labour): ... At its heart, this is about how we as a society live well together. It is not only a matter of security, but a matter of public health, and speaks to our fundamental wellbeing. ...

col 65WH To say that this has been a challenging period for our communities would be an understatement. We continue to see the impact of the ongoing conflict in Gaza on community relations. Meanwhile people are finding it tough to make ends meet, and our public services have been struggling. The Khan review's position on this point is clear: these difficulties risk undermining our social contract, fuelling disillusionment with our democratic system, and allowing extremism, disinformation, and conspiracy theories to take root. ...

We have had review after review, and still no sense of where tensions are, how to prevent them, or how to rebuild after conflict. The constant political turbulence certainly has not helped matters. The integrated communities action plan has had some success, but of 70 commitments listed in it, just 14 have been delivered. ...

col 76WH First, the review is clear that we must take a more proactive approach to community cohesion. That includes learning more about what makes local areas particularly vulnerable or resilient to extremism. ... The recruitment of a new Islamophobia adviser continues to be in doubt. Will the Minister shed some light on any progress made on that issue? ...

What steps is the Minister's Department taking to tackle new forms of radicalisation, including radicalisation that takes place online? The tensions that we are currently seeing are playing out at all levels of our society, including in our classrooms. What discussions has the Minister had with colleagues in the Department for Education about providing the support that teachers need to manage difficult conversations? Finally, can he tell us whether the Government have given up on refreshing the hate crime action plan?

Social cohesion is not a "nice to have". If we do not show leadership and support local authorities to address concerns within their communities, extremists will fill the void. We must start thinking about how we approach proper preventive work that engages communities, rather than waiting for flashpoints to occur. ...

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): ... The first thing to say is that the battle against extremism and the rise of extremist ideology across our country is something that everyone here cares passionately about ...

col 77WH That is one of the reasons why we commissioned the Khan review ... the report outlined some of the challenges we face, not because of decisions that the Government have made ... but ... because of long-term issues that are impacting western democracies across the world and will impact this democracy whoever is in power. ...

The report highlighted particular issues around disinformation, harassment and intimidation; the climate of self-censorship ... across all walks of life; a wider disillusionment with democracy that is starting to seep into parts of our civic society; and decreasing trust in politics, particularly among the young. All of that aggregates to create a vacuum that extremism and extremist ideology can fill. ...

The report shines a light on some fundamental gaps in our system, and it clearly sets out Dame Sara's view of what the Government should do to address those flaws. ...

col 78WH I understand that part of the restructuring of the Prevent funding was about regionalising some elements of the funding, and there are still elements of the support that are available to all local authorities. ...

We must not suggest that it is illegitimate to be proud of this country and to celebrate its

history, its culture, its institutions, its norms and representations of it. Those who over the past 20 years have tried to diminish those things, remove them and pretend they did not happen—those who suggest they are old-fashioned and have no place in our society—are absolutely wrong and do nothing for community cohesion. They do nothing to build the strength and tolerance that our country has thrived on for many decades. ...

... like many others, I may not choose to go to the Proms or to indulge in “Rule, Britannia”, but it is vital that we have a shared understanding of the norms, culture, history, traditions and identity that we share in this country, which have brought us to the place we are today. We should be immensely proud of that. ...

Too many people in this place and elsewhere do not understand the incredibly nefarious effect that postmodernism will have on our society if we are not clear about it. That ideology seeps out of universities, moves into our institutions and infects parts of our public sector, and then moves out into civil society as a whole. It explicitly encourages people to have no shared understanding of our history—it effectively wishes to abolish history—to have no shared lexicon and to play with words to such an extent that reality is completely subverted because we say something is one thing on one day and then pretend it is something else on another.

col 79WH There are entirely arbitrary rules underpinning it, which change based upon the fashion, whoever shouts the loudest, and the time of the day and the day of the week. That is an ideology that will fail, and if we allow it to infect our institutions, our civil society and the work we do in this place and elsewhere, our country will be much weaker, poorer and less able to build the kind of cohesive society that we want. ...

Naz Shah: ... There is this idea that we should have a shared history, but we are not teaching our history in its entirety to our children. We are not talking about togetherness. The Minister might want to read the lecture by the first Muslim Cabinet member, the former Tory chairwoman, Baroness Warsi, who talked about the idea that Muslims do not matter. Does the Minister agree that, if we want a cohesive society, language is key, and the message has to come right from the top in 10 Downing Street? Muslims must not be otherised. Does he not include Muslims in that conversation, because it certainly feels like that?

Lee Rowley: ... Of course Muslims matter. Of course people of all faiths matter. It is frankly outrageous that there is a suggestion that that is not the case. ...

Those of us who are trying to build a cohesive society ... believe that such statements should not be made. They send a message to people who are listening today that, for some reason, there is some kind of fundamental difference and that those of us who have the privilege to sit in this place do not believe in cohesion and want to separate people out on the basis of the skin or the religion they have, and that is fundamentally untrue.

What I find most offensive, most outrageous and most egregious in this culture of grievance that is perpetuated by comments such as the ones put forward a moment ago is the separation of people within our community into backgrounds or experiences or skin colour. ...

col 80WH Those rights are hard won and hard fought for—people have died for them—and we must continually repeat and confirm that in order to ensure that people recognise that these rights are not automatic. ... The situation we are in, including the relatively benign environment we have grown up in, and our right, when we go home to our respective communities, to have the kind of debates and discussions we want, need to be nurtured. If they are not, they wither on the vine; they ossify, and they do not work. ...

col 81WH **Naz Shah:** ... 60% of my constituency is Muslim, as I myself am. I find it really offensive that the Minister is offended that I am stating facts. I am demonstrating that the Government are not walking the walk when delivering on their so-called cohesion policies or their so-called attempts to deliver equality. In fact, I am even more offended at any suggestion that my interventions are about a grievance narrative, when they are actually

all about Muslims just wanting equality. We are not talking about special treatment; nobody in my constituency wants special treatment. What they do want—will the Minister give it and agree?—is equality. ...

Lee Rowley: ... It is important that we build a shared understanding and a shared set of values in this country. I agree that we should be temperate with language. ...

However, I hope the hon. Lady will accept that that is not limited to my party or to the Government—there have been multiple examples. However, if we just trade off on the basis of who said what where, or make some kind of case that one political party is worse than the other, when we know that they have all had significant issues with community relations over many years—only one party got into the place it did with regard to antisemitism a number of years ago—we will be much poorer in the debate about this issue. ...

She knows that the Inter Faith Network's funding was withdrawn because of a decision to appoint somebody who had a background in a particular organisation—that was a choice that the organisation made, and it appointed that person. The policy of non-engagement with the Muslim Council of Britain has been in place since the Labour party was in power. Indeed, it was the former Labour Member for Salford—the Secretary of State in the predecessor to my Department—who started that policy of non-engagement with the Muslim Council of Britain in 2009, which my party continues to this day. ...

col 82WH ... today has shown that all of us feel extremely passionately about ensuring that we build a society that is cohesive and resilient for the long run, and about seeking to utilise what the Government can do to move forward the things we see in our individual communities ...

Despite the robustness of the debate, and despite my fundamental disagreements with some of the points that were made, I think it has been a useful debate ...

col 83WH **Jonathan Gullis:** ... I want to reflect on a few of the things that have been said. First, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) ... should rightly be horrified to antisemitic tropes, words and images projected on to buildings in Belfast, as we sadly saw happen here on Elizabeth Tower. It is completely abhorrent that that kind of thing is taking place, and the police must crack down on it. ...

I am proud to wear or wave the St George's flag, as I am the Union flag. I am proud to say that I am British and English. I am proud to sing "Three lions on a shirt" as much as I am to sing "Rule, Britannia" ...

col 84WH It is important to understand that there was a groundswell of anger among the public, including people like myself, who voted to leave and who campaigned to leave the European Union. We felt that this place was, sadly, not hearing or representing those views and that others in this place ... were pushing the idea that people were somehow thick, uneducated or racist in wanting to see that democratic right delivered. That fed into some of those far-right extremist groups, which were able to proliferate off the back of that.

It has taken a long time to rebuild that trust. These things led to an undermining of our democratic system, which is why 42% of people still chose not to cast a vote in the 2019 general election. That is very sad indeed and was used by groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, which actually encouraged people not to take part in the democratic process—sadly, in this case, the Muslim community, in particular. ...

I taught religious education for eight years in secondary state schools ... and Islam is a religion of peace. It is stated very clearly that to take one life is effectively to take the lives of all humankind. It is therefore entirely appropriate to make it abundantly clear to extremist groups—those on the far right, but also those in the Islamic community that pursue a twisted perversion of what Islam is actually about—that that is simply wrong and abhorrent. The word "jihad", which is sadly now used in terrorist atrocities, actually has a very different meaning—that if, God forbid, holy war is required, innocent women and children of all races and faiths are to be left aside, and all religions are to be left in peace. Ultimately, it

is only done in the defence of one's faith ...

I represent a large Pakistani and Muslim community, and given the recent tensions around what has unfolded in the middle east, its members may feel that I do not advocate their particular view as much as they would like me to. I want to let them know that I do, and I will always stand up for the positive nature of that community and what it has done. ...

col 85WH It is important that we continue to have this informed debate and that we make sure that all sides of the argument are heard. Most importantly, however, we must allow mainstream views to continue to be held by mainstream parties in a good-quality, good old-fashioned democratic debate, rather than allowing the wider public to feel marginalised, so that they look to the extremist elements of society, thinking that their views will be heard or supported there. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/E4FD6B16-739F-4FBD-AA60-F78D0393C9E1/SocialCohesionAndDemocraticResilienceKhanReview>

The Khan Review, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-khan-review-threats-to-social-cohesion-and-democratic-resilience/the-khan-review-executive-summary-key-findings-and-recommendations>

Baroness Warsi's lecture, referred to above by Naz Shah, can be read at

<https://sayeedawarsi.com/muslims-dont-matter/>

Assisted Dying

col 1WH **Tonia Antoniazzi (Labour):** That this House has considered e-petition 653593 relating to assisted dying. ...

There is no set definition of assisted dying so let me clarify at the outset that here we are referring to the involvement of healthcare professionals in the provision of lethal drugs intended to end a patient's life at their voluntary request, subject to eligibility criteria and safeguards. That includes healthcare professionals prescribing lethal drugs for the patient to self-administer, and healthcare professionals administering lethal drugs. ...

In July 2022, this House considered e-petition 604383, which asked Parliament to legalise assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults; that petition had more than 155,000 signatures. The fact that, in less than two years, we have had two petitions debates on this subject clearly indicates to me and to others that this issue is one that our constituents are highly engaged in, and I have no doubt that Dame Esther Rantzen has contributed to the heightened awareness of assisted dying. ...

col 2WH Whatever our own views, we must recognise that public opinion on assisted dying has shifted in one direction. Polls by Dignity in Dying have shown overwhelming support for changes to the law, with safeguards in place. Membership of Dignitas held by UK citizens has increased to 1,900, with a 23% rise during 2023. ...

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat): ... My colleague Liam McArthur has a Bill going through the Scottish Parliament at the moment. Similar legislation is being considered in the Isle of Man and in the Channel Islands. This issue will have to be addressed. ...

Tonia Antoniazzi: ... It is important to consider that, and to look at what is done well and not so well. ...

"Choice" is a key word for Dame Esther and for many of those who have signed the petition. This is about having the choice to die under their own conditions, with dignity and without struggle.

Alex Davies-Jones (Labour): ... The fact of the matter is that people can have a good death if they can afford it and are physically able to fly to Switzerland. That is grossly unfair. ...

col 3WH Edward Leigh (Conservative): ... surely one way to approach this problem is for us to get much better palliative care in place throughout the country. Everybody should be entitled to a dignified death. On this point, under the law of double effect, it is perfectly proper for a qualified doctor to relieve pain with very large amounts of morphine as long as his or her primary purpose is not to kill the patient.

Tonia Antoniazzi: ... two thirds of palliative care in the United Kingdom is actually funded by charities. It is a postcode lottery. ...

Caroline Lucas (Green): ... assisted dying can be a catalyst for more resources to go into palliative care ... That is exactly what we have seen under many Administrations around the world.

Tonia Antoniazzi: ... a valid point.

How your family remember you and those last, dying hours with them is also what worries people such as Esther Rantzen. So often, it is the struggle that sticks in the mind of family members when they lose a loved one.

One thing that we can agree on is that this choice must be the choice of the individual and one that is well informed. There are always intended and unintended consequences to any legislation, and it is perhaps naive to suggest that any change in the law would not have wider consequences in society, beyond the individual making the choice. ... In 2023, the Danish ethics council concluded that the existence of an offer of assisted dying would decisively change ideas about old age, quality of life and dying, and that there was too great a risk that it would become an expectation aimed at certain groups in society. How do we prevent vulnerable people from experiencing coercion at a time when they are afraid and ill? ...

Julian Lewis (Conservative): ... how do we set a safeguard against the person themselves feeling that they have to accept that they will die by their own request rather than be a burden to others? We can protect them from the pressure of others. We cannot protect them from the pressures that they will put on themselves, even though they do not really want to die.

col 4WH Tonia Antoniazzi: ... We need to see how this has worked in other countries, look at data, be specific and take our role as legislators seriously. ...

The Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland and the Royal College of General Practitioners oppose any law changes, while the British Medical Association holds a neutral stance. ...

Rupa Huq (Labour): ... some of us are massively conflicted on this issue ... When it comes to abortion I am very pro-choice, but last time we voted on this subject I actively abstained—voted yes and no—and was relieved that the status quo was upheld. Does my hon. Friend agree that some of us are relieved that there is no vote today? ...

Tonia Antoniazzi: ... In their response to the petition, the Government said: “It remains the Government’s view that any change to the law in this sensitive area is a matter for Parliament to decide...If the will of Parliament is that the law on assisting suicide should change, the Government would not stand in its way, but would seek to ensure that the law could be enforced in the way that Parliament intended.” ...

In February this year, the Health and Social Care Committee published its report on assisted dying, as I mentioned. The report did not make any recommendations on law changes; rather, the aim was for the report to serve as a basis for discussion and further debate in Parliament.

A common theme in the evidence submitted to the Committee’s inquiry was what many respondents called “a good death”. I want to make it abundantly clear that assisted dying should not be discussed as a replacement for palliative care; we must also have frank discussions about how palliative care can be improved, so that we can give people the most comfortable end of life possible. ...

col 5WH As I mentioned, about two thirds of the funding for palliative care comes from

charitable organisations, and I really do not see how that is good enough.

Should the law on assisted dying change and any services be covered by state funding, what message would that send? ...

... if someone has a terminal diagnosis and is mentally sound, should they not have the choice to take themselves out of suffering? ...

col 6WH Peter Bottomley (Conservative): ... There are about 5,000 to 6,000 suicides a year in this country. Do people think we are talking about 100 people a year extra or 1,000? I put it to the people here that if we had a Dutch level of medical assistance in death, we would add 15,000 deaths a year—we would treble the number of existing suicides and, including the existing figure, take it up to four times.

People talk about the safeguards and conditions. There is a list of all the conditions and safeguards that other countries are taking away. It starts with, say, the people who cannot afford to go to Dignitas and expands to those who are depressed. ...

col 7WH George Howarth (Labour): ... I want to address the principle by referring to two arguments commonly used to oppose such legislation. The first concerns issues of faith and the second ... is about pressure being put on people to make a decision that they might not agree with when the time comes. ...

I certainly do not want to get caught up in any tangled theological debates, but as a Christian myself, I think that two important principles are involved. First is the argument that we are all—particularly those of us brought up in an Abrahamic faith—given free will. Our life is not mapped out before us; we have the free will to make choices at certain times in our lives. I also cannot imagine that the God I was brought up to respect as a Christian would want people to die in pain and suffering in a way that is, I think, unchristian.

The second argument is the one that has already been referred to—that at some point along the road to the end of their lives people will be put under pressure to make a decision that they either do not really want or that they do not want to be exercised when the time comes. I have thought a great deal about that argument and it seems to me that it is based on an unduly pessimistic view of human nature: that people will pressure their close relative or loved one to take such a decision purely on the grounds that it might serve them well financially—their motivation is venal, in other words—or because they want to avoid caring responsibilities in the later stages of their loved one's life. I do not believe that that is how the majority of people take those decisions. I concede that some people might act in that way, but I think that the overwhelming majority will act as they act—out of love, rather than out of self-serving motives. The issue also comes back to the exercise of free will. ...

col 8WH Steve Brine (Conservative): ... the Health and Social Care Committee ... report ... includes roundtables with people who have lived experience; we talked to health and care workers from across the NHS and social care, including people who on a daily basis provide care to people at the end of their lives ... We received just shy of 68,000 responses to our online form, which is the largest number of responses of that type to any engagement from a House of Commons Committee. ...

... the Government made it clear that they will not bring forward legislation in this area and that it was more possible that a change in law would be sought through a private Member's Bill; that is indeed what has happened in other jurisdictions where assisted dying has become the law. ...

col 9WH ... we visited Oregon, and there has been such legislation there for two decades. Its legislation comes into the category whereby a person receives an established terminal diagnosis, which means that they are likely to die within a prescribed period—six months. In the Netherlands, however, the legislation applies a much wider set of criteria: the person seeking to access assisted dying can do so on the basis of “unbearable suffering”, subject to their own experience. ...

We did not find any evidence that the quality of palliative and end-of-life care deteriorated

after the introduction of assisted dying in those jurisdictions; in fact, there is some evidence to suggest that there has been an increase in the funding of palliative care services ...

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): ... Not only should there be more investment in palliative care, but we should push on with the opportunity for more research in that area. Of course, we should also address the social factors that are cited as reasons why people want to access palliative care. It is often about poor death literacy. ...

We must also look at the reasons why people have opted for end of life in other jurisdictions, as set out in the petition, including the loss of meaningful daily activities, the loss of dignity and incontinence. For many people, perhaps those with an impairment, that is their daily experience, and yet it would be wrong to say that that dehumanises them as individuals. We should move on from the embarrassment and inconvenience and look at how quality of life can be given to everyone, no matter their impairment.

col 10WH Loneliness and isolation are also cited, but that is a societal failure that must be addressed. If we improve our NHS care, our social care and civil society, many of those reasons will be dismissed. ...

I am worried about the person who says, "I'm just getting in the way. My children will have a better future without me. Perhaps the savings I have put aside could be better spent by them than on me." It is not necessarily coercion, but the way that people feel in a society that changes the law. We have much to address, including the physical, psychological and spiritual needs of people in our country, and that must be our first consideration. ...

David Davis (Conservative): I am not a religious man, but I have always viewed life as sacred. For most of my life, I have been disinclined to accept the arguments of people who are in favour of assisted dying, but various events have changed my view in the past several years. Some time ago ... my mother died of brain and lung cancer in considerable agony, pain and, I suspect, terror, too. I am pretty sure that the doctors in charge of her accelerated her demise. I am glad they did. ... it was a good thing for her to go more peacefully with an excess of morphine ...

I suspect that it was the unstated norm to do that in those days, and doctors took those decisions quite properly themselves. But I also suspect that that changed after the Shipman scandal. ...

But let us be clear: we must not make the same mistakes as other countries. I am thinking particularly of Canada and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, for example, several people with autism and intellectual disabilities have brought on the end of their life, some of them before the age of 30. That is not acceptable. Similar weaknesses apply in Canada. ...

col 11WH **Paul Blomfield (Labour):** ... Since 2015, over a dozen jurisdictions around the world have introduced laws enabling choice at the end of life. Today, over 30 offer that choice, with protections, covering hundreds of millions of people. In the UK, the medical profession has dropped its opposition. Legislators in Scotland, Jersey and the Isle of Man are crafting laws that will give choice and protection. ...

[The Committee] report drew heavily on the practical experience of jurisdictions that have legalised assisted dying. They take two routes, one based on terminal illness and the other on adding wider criteria, such as intolerable suffering. My remarks are based on those opting for terminal illness alone ...

col 12WH We listened hard to the concerns of those opposing law change. They fell into three areas, but our evidence provided reassurance on all three. We found that not a single jurisdiction that opted for assisted dying for terminal illness had extended it beyond that definition, so there is no slippery slope. We found no evidence of coercion in jurisdictions allowing assisted dying. That is not to say that coercion does not exist, but assisted dying laws seek to provide protection, in contrast to our current law. How do we know that the 650 people who take their own lives now are not coerced or did not take that decision because they felt themselves to be a burden? We talk rightly in this debate about safety,

but it is the current law that is unsafe. ...

Andrew Selous (Conservative): ... I have to say that I was deeply shocked by the remarks of the journalist Matthew Parris, who said in an article recently that he welcomes this being the thin end of the wedge, that he makes no apology for treating human beings as “units”, and that we should be making the cold calculus of inputs and outputs. I am appalled by that. I hope that every Member here is appalled by that type of discussion about our frail and elderly fellow citizens, who have a right to dignity and care until the very end of their lives. ...

col 13WH I also think we need to look at the quality of life for people in their final days. I was sat next to one of my constituents this morning, who talked about how bored his 92-year-old father is in his dying days. That is an issue for us as well. ... Life should provide things for people to live for, and we need to make sure that our elderly and those towards the end of their life are not bored and not lacking in stimulation such that they think they have nothing to live for. ...

Rachel Hopkins (Labour): ... inequality forces many people who do not have other options to take their own life. Each year, up to 650 terminally ill individuals end their lives, with many more attempting to do so, often in secret and using unsafe methods at home. The lack of safeguards, regulation and oversight forces dying individuals to take matters into their own hands without adequate support for them or their families. As a humanist, I believe in individuals' right to make informed choices about their own care and quality of life, and I do not believe that people should be forced into making horrible, lonely decisions to end their own life, something that the blanket ban on assisted dying in this country fails to recognise.

The legalisation of assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults must be introduced, with robust safeguards, to promote freedom of choice at the end of life. I reiterate: this is about choice. I agree that better pain management and much more support for palliative care are needed, but it is also about choice—if people wish to choose it. People deserve autonomy and compassion in their end-of-life decisions. ...

col 15WH **Andy Slaughter (Labour):** ... Public opinion is leading on this. That does not mean that we have to follow public opinion, but there is a substantial change in the mood of the public and overwhelming support for some form of assisted dying, whereas the arguments and opinions have not greatly moved on over the last 10 years. For me, this is about one very simple question: that at the end of my life, it is not just my choice but my right to decide the manner and timing of my leaving it.

I hope first for a huge improvement in palliative care. ...

In reality, I do not believe that anybody would say that their religion or their personal views should impact on my choice. The issue is whether there is undue pressure—by the state, the family or the person themselves in considering that act. We have many laws for dealing with coercive behaviour. We should have better palliative care. As a society, we should be able to reassure people that they are all valued as long as they want to be with us, even at the end of life and even, perhaps, in great pain and suffering. That should not be a barrier to those who wish to decide to leave because of great pain, because of great suffering and because the end of their life is near. ...

col 16WH **Kit Malthouse (Conservative):** ... When Esther Rantzen stepped forward and talked about the impact that her disease was having on her, as well as about her decisions for the future, it should come as no surprise that there was an outpouring of support from the British people, because for many people she was part of the family. ... Now that she is facing a horrible death and, with money, has decided to make the choice, the British people have obviously stood up and listened to the fact that she is supporting the campaign for a change in the law.

The British people listened to such an extent that they now do not really understand why politicians tolerate or talk about three particular things. First, they do not understand how

so many Members in this House can stand for the status quo when, as has already been stated, the status quo is appalling. We have hundreds of people taking their own lives in this country—thousands dying agonising, horrible deaths when they may wish to do something different. Of course, we also have business class, so it is even worse: if you have the money, you can have what the law denies to everybody else. It is an outrage, and it should change. ...

Secondly, the British people do not understand this view that the country is teeming with granny killers—that all of us are just waiting to bump off a wealthy relative so we can pocket the cash ... The vast majority of British people love their parents and grandparents. They want the best for them, and they agonise when they die. ...

Thirdly, the British people do not understand how people of a genuine religious faith can seek to impose their own morality on the rest of us. They have not done so on gay marriage. They did not do so on homosexuality, adultery, abortion or sex before marriage. Why on this issue should the British people be denied a choice, because of the—certainly legitimately held—religious convictions of others? ...

col 17WH Christine Jardine (Liberal Democrat) ... my colleague Liam McArthur is currently steering a private Member's Bill on this issue through the Scottish Parliament. If he is successful, I would hypothetically have a choice denied to so many other people in this room—a significant choice. Another Bill that is about to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament by a Conservative MSP is about improving palliative care. Liam and Miles Briggs are working together, because the two are not mutually exclusive. We should see it as a choice between assisted dying or palliative care not for us, but for the individuals affected. They should have the choice.

The time has come when we need to recognise that there is momentum; other parts of the UK will make decisions on this shortly. ...

col 18WH Stephen Timms (Labour): ... I understand the proposition that people with a diagnosis of terminal illness should be allowed help to die, but it is clear from what happens elsewhere that if that did happen, it would not remain subject to that narrow criterion. It would not end there. Indeed, the campaign to broaden the scope has already begun. Matthew Parris wrote in his column in *The Times* that we need assisted suicide because old people cost too much. He said: "Your time is up' will never be an order, but—yes, the objectors are right—may one day be the kind of unspoken hint that everybody understands. And that's a good thing."

I cannot see that that would be a good thing. It seems to me that legalising assisted dying would impose a terrible dilemma on frail people, elderly people and others when they are at the most vulnerable point in their lives, especially on conscientious frail people who do not want to die but do not want to be a burden. ...

It is reported that in Oregon since 2017, over half the applicants for assisted dying have applied not because they want to die but because they feel that that they are a burden. The next time we have a Government committed to austerity, the temptation to cut health service costs by allowing people to choose to end their lives in a wider set of circumstances, instead of funding their care, would, I fear, be irresistible. ...

col 19WH Fiona Bruce (Conservative): ... In 2021 a Survation poll asked more than 1,000 members of the public what they thought ["assisted dying"] meant. Only four in 10 correctly understood it to mean providing lethal drugs to those with less than six months to live to end their life. The same proportion incorrectly thought that it meant giving people who are dying the right to stop life-prolonging treatment, which is already legal in the UK. Worryingly, one in 10 said that the term referred to the provision of hospice-type care for people who are dying. So six in 10 people did not understand what "assisted dying" actually means. ...

Let us consider a recent Dignity in Dying poll, which concluded that 75% of Brits supported assisted dying. That had fallen from 84% in a 2019 Populus poll. But how strong is the

supposed support? That recent poll found that only four in 10 of those polled wanted their MP to vote in favour of assisted dying. It seems that out of the initial 75%, almost half did not support the cause enough to want the law to change. To proclaim that nearly eight in 10 Brits want assisted dying cannot be accepted as a fair representation.

A more committed and thorough approach to understanding what our constituents think might lead us to reflect on a 2014 ComRes poll, which found that the proportion of people who supported assisted dying stood at seven out of 10 when initially asked, but fell dramatically to four in 10 when presented with the full picture of the arguments against assisted dying, and so equipped to make a more informed decision. ...

col 20WH **Caroline Lucas:** ... The current blanket ban on assisted dying does not just rob dying people of any meaningful choice, but it perpetuates inequality. We have heard about the £15,000 that it costs to go to Dignitas. People often have to go alone, as the law prevents assistance from their loved ones, as we know, so that they might face prosecution when they return. People go much earlier than they need to because they have to be well enough to make the journey, so they die too soon.

For those who cannot afford to travel abroad, the choices are fewer. They might be subject to a lottery of compassionate but illegal co-operation from their healthcare providers. Others might feel forced to take things into their own hands in violent and lonely ways. Some choose to hasten their deaths, with the support of doctors, by refusing food and water. Rather than keeping people safe, we are inadvertently permitting assisted dying in a way that lacks any regulation or oversight, or indeed compassion. ...

... some people have concerns about how, for example, assisted dying could inadvertently reinforce the discrimination that people with disabilities already face, so I want to be clear that resourcing and enabling disabled people to live dignified, full and long lives must be an absolute priority for us all, irrespective of our views on assisted dying. ...

The current law does not eradicate demand for assisted dying. It just drives the practice overseas, or behind closed doors where there are no safeguards in place to protect people. In fact, introducing a strictly safeguarded law with tight restrictions is the best way to protect those who are at risk of pressure to hasten their deaths against their wishes.

It is wrong to think that current practices in end of life care do not already demand the medical profession to be alert to the possibility of coercive control. A change in the law could strengthen doctors' skills in that area and enhance our understanding of and ability to protect against it. For example, we could have in place mandated training so that doctors recognise even more easily the signs of coercion and, critically, we could create a specific criminal offence for the act of coercing a person into an assisted death. ...

col 21WH **Tobias Ellwood (Conservative):** ... We must now have the courage to take this issue further, because the legislation is out of date. Under the Suicide Act 1961, anyone involved in assisting another person's death could be subject to a 14-year custodial sentence. The world has changed since 1961. First, medicines significantly extend life, so we keep people alive longer, but their quality of life is not necessarily the same; and of course, as we are illustrating here today, attitudes are changing. ...

Since the establishment of Dignitas in Switzerland in 1998, some Britons have chosen to travel to Zurich and pay £10,000 to £15,000 in order to say goodbye to their loved ones on the family's terms, and I understand that for the last decade, the Crown Prosecution Service has not charged anyone for assisted dying. The law as it stands is not working; it is not enforced. ...

The current system fails on three counts. First, with a terminal illness, there is the potential to experience pain and mental hardship as the body slows and loses strength. Secondly, it obliges families and loved ones to witness that deterioration, causing its own stress. Finally ... there is the added anxiety of not knowing for sure whether there will be a knock on the door from the Crown Prosecution Service. ...

col 22WH **Ian Paisley (DUP):** ... in a brilliant article on 7 April, Sonia Sodha outlined some

things that I think should be compulsory reading for anyone engaging in this debate. She deals with the issue of coercion and she comments to the effect that we are in a day and age when coercive control is the norm for many in relationships. She blows a hole through the notion that we are in a free society to make these decisions. ...

One third of suicides of females in the United Kingdom are related to intimate partner abuse—just think about that. We have all read the stories, seen the court reports and heard from our constituents about coercive and abusive control of females in our society: “I hate you”; “You’re not worthy of my love”; “Your children hate you”; “Are you still alive?” We know what that does to people and what it drives them to do. It controls them and creates a very ugly environment for them to live in. That type of abuse is all too prevalent in our society. The elderly are similarly abused: “Mum had a good life, you know”; “You know, they’re done, really”; “It’s going to be very costly to keep them in this health service.” All that pressure builds.

All those people who tell us that there is no coercion, anti-disability prejudice, emotional abuse or financial abuse in this society are wrong: there is, and all those factors influence people to say, “Maybe I should end my life.”

Wera Hobhouse (Liberal Democrat): Can the hon. Gentleman explain whether a doctor who diagnoses a terminal illness is part of that manipulative coercion?

Ian Paisley: That is actually a brilliant point ... Some Members have said, “There are going to be brilliant safeguards,” yet every single one of them has told me and this House over the years how rubbish and useless the law is ... The very same people who tell us that we will have safeguards tell us every single day that they cannot create those sorts of safeguards.

Look at what happened in Canada. It was said in 2016 that its legislation would have a very narrow scope, but that narrow scope has turned into discussions about disability, sick children and chronic mental illness. Those are all now within the purview of the Canadian law, but of course they were never supposed to be. ...

col 23WH Thérèse Coffey (Conservative): ... What did come ... were guidelines for the Crown Prosecution Service, put in place by the then Director of Public Prosecutions—now the Leader of His Majesty’s Opposition—which seem to have stood the test of time. Back in March 2012, when this House debated those rules, it voted against the proposal to make them statutory guidance while adding its support for palliative care and hospital provision. ...

On 11 December 2015, 330 MPs voted against changing the law, which is three quarters of the MPs who voted that day. ... 70% of the House participated in that Division. ...

Fiona Bruce: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, at the same time that this country’s Parliament voted against legalising assisted suicide, a different decision was made in Canada? In 2016, the first year of medically assisted deaths, 1,000 people chose to have one. By 2022, more than 13,000 people had availed themselves of that law, representing a 30% year-on-year increase.

col 24WH Thérèse Coffey: My hon. Friend points out how this starts to increase quite significantly. It was also in Canada that a distinguished Paralympian who was looking for help with their disability was offered assisted dying as an alternative to adaptation of their home.

There has been a lot of discussion today about elderly people, but we are not just talking about elderly people. We are talking about vulnerable people. We are talking about people with disability. We are talking about people who could be taken advantage of to end their lives early and who may have that element of being considered a burden. ...

Damian Egan (Labour): ... With over 400 million people around the world living in countries and jurisdictions that have introduced a form of assisted dying, there is much to learn from. ... On one extreme, I was taken aback by examples from the Netherlands of people ending their lives due to mental illness. I worry about assisted dying being seen as

an alternative to palliative care, about people feeling like a burden on their families, and of course about coercion. ...

However, I bring Members back to the example of Oregon, where legislation has existed for 27 years, and has not actually been extended. ...

col 25WH Desmond Swayne (Conservative): A couple of years ago, on the near continent, a young woman of 23 years was euthanised, having suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder since 2016. Although physically uninjured, she had witnessed school friends being blown to smithereens in the bombing of Brussels airport. I put it to Members that if we use assisted dying as a therapy to end suffering for which other therapies exist, we will have made a profound transformation in assisted dying, changing it from being a means of ending suffering in death, to a means of ending suffering in life. ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... Introducing so-called “assisted dying” would fundamentally and irreversibly change the relationship between doctors and patients, and how we think about healthcare. The duty of a doctor is to save life, not end it. It is there in the words of the Hippocratic oath—to “do no harm” and not to: “administer a poison to anybody when asked to do so”.

Even the modernised versions of the Hippocratic oath, which all doctors must take, clearly state: “I shall never intentionally cause harm to my patients, and will have the utmost respect for human life.” ...

col 26WH The Royal College of GPs continues to oppose assisted suicide, after the results of a consultation. The British Medical Association did the same. It was said that “When the votes were analysed by the BMA, it was found that majorities of members whose work brought them into close and regular contact with terminally ill patients, including palliative medicine doctors, geriatricians and GPs, were opposed to legalisation, while respondents who had voted for legal change contained a majority of retired doctors, medical students and those in branches of medicine which involve little or no contact with terminally or otherwise incurably ill patients.”

Ian Paisley: ... Regarding safeguards, we are told that one of the ideas for future legislation is that two doctors and a judge will ensure that there are plenty of safeguards. Does he agree that our courts have so far been utterly useless in finding family abuse in many situations and so they do not offer a safeguard at all?

Jim Shannon: ... absolutely right ... In Belgium, courts have ruled that doctors have an obligation to make effective referrals even if they themselves are unwilling to take part in assisted dying. Canada is the very same. ... The right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) ... made the point very clearly that in other words there is a duty to inform patients that an assisted death is an option. That should never ever be the case. It is not too hard to see how, in such a context, vulnerable people may feel that they ought to end their life early to avoid being a burden or because of medical advice. Assisted suicide can never be just about one person and their own choices. It would irreversibly transform the role of the NHS and the patient-doctor dynamic. ...

The duty of doctors in society as a whole is to care for the vulnerable and therefore we must continue to resist attempts to introduce assisted suicide. ... we must err on the side of caution to ensure that the option of assisted dying does not lead to pressure on those who are older, vulnerable and feeling that the best thing for them to do would be to go quietly, to save people money and to save putting pressure on the NHS, when instead they could have 10 more years to live a full life, enriching the lives of their family and their community.

col 27WH Danny Kruger (Conservative): ... it is not the case that the majority of the public support what is euphemistically called “assisted dying”. When the details of the proposed law change are explained to people, a majority of people oppose a change in the law. Crucially and most importantly, the doctors who work with the dying—people in palliative care and geriatric care, and GPs—overwhelmingly oppose a change in the law ...

while there might be overall polls that suggest public support, in fact, when professionals, members of the public and MPs get the chance to look at this closely, they end up opposing a change in the law, and for good reason. ...

col 28WH ... what does go up in countries that have legalised assisted suicide is suicide itself in the general population. The fact is that suicide is contagious. Suicides among people who would not be eligible for assisted suicide increase in countries that have legalised it. ...

The definition of terminal illness is incredibly difficult, and people can always find a doctor to demonstrate it. ...

Robin Millar (Conservative): I note from the Health and Social Care Committee's "Assisted Dying/Assisted Suicide" report that: "Wherever the boundaries are set, evidence from other jurisdictions shows that the boundaries are eroded and criteria expanded, with concomitant escalation in numbers, most markedly seen in Canada." ...

Danny Kruger: ... Baroness Campbell, herself a wheelchair user, said that: "The existing law...rests on a natural frontier", namely that we do not kill people. She asked: "What the proponents of 'assisted dying' want is to replace that clear and bright line with an arbitrary and permeable one...If terminal illness, why not chronic and progressive conditions? And, if chronic and progressive conditions, why not seriously disabled people?"

col 29WH It is impossible to make distinctions between those terms. That is why the law always has the scope for its own expansion within it. That is why we should oppose the change.

Carla Lockhart (DUP): ... The supporters of the petition want to alleviate suffering at the end of life. That is a commendable motivation, and something we can all agree on. However, making it legal for doctors to help people to kill themselves is simply not the answer. ... We are all in favour of helping people in their dying moments, comforting them and relieving their pain, but that is categorically different from bringing in a law that says that killing yourself is an acceptable thing to do. ...

... the one thing that these people do not need is the law telling them that their lives are not worth living or that they are costing too much. We need to tell such people that they are valued, that they are important, and that we care for them—no matter the cost. ...

As we have heard ... when the law is introduced it is expanded and the potential safeguards are not safeguards at all—it is a slippery slope. By investing in social care, by continuing to be a world leader in palliative care, and by being a society that respects life and upholds the dignity of the elderly and of people with disabilities, we can give hope to the hopeless and create a society where assisted suicide is not needed. ...

col 30WH Whenever assisted suicide has been legalised, however tight the initial safeguards and however sincere the assurances that it will be a narrowly defined law for rare cases, the practice has rapidly expanded. ...

In Canada, it took only five years from the 2016 introduction of assisted suicide for those whose death was "reasonably foreseeable" to be expanded to the ill-defined "serious and incurable illnesses" criteria in 2021. In Oregon, in the US, people have been given assisted deaths because of diabetes, hernias, arthritis and anorexia, with the "terminal illness" interpretation now wide and wieldy. In the Netherlands and Belgium, child euthanasia has been legalised, as well as euthanasia for mental illness and dementia.

I conclude by quoting the national Danish Council of Ethics. Having considered the issue in detail, including examining the evidence from supposedly safe places such as Oregon, it concluded: "The only thing that will be able to protect the lives...of those who are most vulnerable in society will be a ban without exception." ...

col 31WH **Simon Jupp (Conservative):** ... Assisted dying does not replace palliative care and end-of-life services ... Someone approaching the end of their life or living with serious illness should be provided with the care and treatment they need to maximise their quality of life and minimise any suffering or distress. ... assisted dying should be an additional

choice that terminally ill, mentally competent adults with six months or less to live should be able to make because they want more control over the manner and timing of their death. ...

col 34WH Chloe Smith (Conservative): ... The problems in our law are twofold: it is not just that it forces honest people to go underground, but that it is not currently neutral. This debate is about a choice that has already been taken in law. We are not starting from neutral ground ... The main problem with that lack of neutrality is that it is heartbreaking to make carers risk a charge on top of their grief. ... we should bring these quite awful ethical choices into the light, and give people dignity and support. People are suffering cruelly, and I hope the next generation of MPs will take courage.

Nick Fletcher (Conservative): On 7 May, surrounded by her family, Shanti Di Corte was euthanised. She was 23 years old. Six years earlier, on 22 March 2016, Shanti had been at Brussels airport when terrorists set off bombs. Her assisted death has been added to the number killed in that atrocity. She suffered immensely with PTSD.

At 2 pm on Friday 26 February 2018, 29-year-old Aurelia Brouwers was allowed to end her life on account of psychiatric illness. Zoraya ter Beek has chosen euthanasia because of crippling depression; she is 28, and she is scheduled to die in May. Does anybody here want to be part of a decision that allows a young person to schedule their death? ...

In the Netherlands, euthanasia now accounts for 5% of all deaths. ...

As we have seen in other countries, assisted dying starts with the terminally ill, but too often the scope is widened to include disabled individuals and, as with the three women I mentioned, individuals with mental health issues. How many among our population are struggling with their mental health at present but will no doubt, after a relatively short period of time, be back to having a good and meaningful life once more? Yet sadly, if we follow the example of these countries, we will be ending the lives of young people in their 20s and 30s. To anyone who thinks this would never happen on their watch and that it would only ever be for the terminally ill, I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but you are wrong. ...

col 35WH Robin Millar: ... As parliamentarians, it is our job not only to represent those with a voice—those who are motivated, interested, engaged and who grab our attention. Our job is also to represent those without a voice—those who are vulnerable, who cannot speak or who speak with a very quiet voice. It is our duty to represent their interests and consider their situations as well. ...

The point has been made in other places that suicide rates in countries where this legislation is introduced go up, and it is that normalising that I am particularly concerned about. In Scotland, the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill includes a definition of terminal illness, which could be seen to include things like type 1 diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis. To quote the Health and Social Care Committee's report again, it states on page 45: "Wherever the boundaries are set, evidence from other jurisdictions shows that the boundaries are eroded and criteria expanded". ...

col 36WH Jim Shannon: To add to the hon. Member's concerns over what is coming out of Scotland, it has been suggested that even young girls with anorexia could find themselves in a position where they might feel constrained to do this. ...

Robin Millar: That speaks to my concern about normalisation. If we introduce legislation that says, "It is acceptable to end life for a wider range of conditions"—the evidence before us in Scotland is that that interpretation is correct—we risk normalising suicide as a prescription.

Thérèse Coffey: My hon. Friend is making a perfect point in terms of clause 2 of the proposed Bill going through the Scottish Parliament at the moment. There is no mention of 12 months and no mention of a person dying at a particular time. It is simply about aspects of a condition from which someone is not able to recover and could reasonably expect a premature death. The worry that we have is the interpretation of the law. It has

undoubtedly expanded around the world such that we have seen an increase in the number of people with assisted suicide.

Robin Millar: ... we must never get to a point where assisted dying is seen as a prescription. We must never get to a point where we see death as a treatment. ...

col 37WH Ruth Cadbury (Labour): ... The process in issues of conscience means that it would be for a Member of Parliament rather than the Government to introduce the change in law. It would be debated and refined on a cross-party basis with each Member free to speak and vote according to their own conscience. Any Government must ensure that any proposal carries with it proper and strong safeguards. It damages the cause if such reforms are rushed through with inadequate consideration. If any reforms do not recognise the concerns that many people have, including those who support reform in principle, we will not receive the consensus that any change must have.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Sir David Davis) addressed the concern that in Canada and the Netherlands, issues of cognitive impairment or mental illness might be reasons for people to consider assisted dying. We must listen to those concerns. We must also listen to those who are or who represent the elderly, people with disabilities and those who face life-changing conditions.

Steve Brine: ... It is true that Canada did extend the MAID—medical assistance in dying—provisions to include those who are suffering from a mental illness. However, on 29 February this year, Bill C-62, as they name them there, received Royal Assent, postponing that eligibility until 17 March 2027. ...

Ruth Cadbury: We have heard concerns about vulnerable adults nearing the end of their life who could be at risk of pressure from either family members who feel incapable, for whatever reason, of providing care and support for a terminally ill person, or, as eloquently touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Sir George Howarth), those with even worse motives. If reform is offered, it is essential that there is a plan for robust and effective safeguards against those issues. ...

col 38WH We know that we need to improve palliative care in this country. ... Irrespective of what happens with the law on assisted dying and what choices we take, we must improve end of life care in this country. ...

The issue of choice has been mentioned many times by Members. ... others have addressed the fact that going to Dignitas is expensive and out of reach for many, and those who do go are not able to have close family with them because that would risk police investigation ...

To conclude, only by reforming the law, and introducing safeguards to address the concerns that hon. Members have raised today, can we move the law forward—a law that is about personal freedom and morality. As the Supreme Court has decided, only Parliament can make the change. I want to restate our clear commitment that a future Labour Government would make time for a private Member's Bill so that Parliament can have the final say through a free vote following a full debate and a process of amendments. ...

col 39WH The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Laura Farris): ... this debate ... calls into conflict two fundamental values—the right to individual autonomy and the sanctity of life. ...

Before turning to individual questions, I will set out the Government's position. Our view remains that any relaxation of the law is an issue of conscience for individual parliamentarians, rather than one for Government policy. In the tradition of all conscience matters where the Government maintain a neutral stance, that is typically achieved through a private Member's Bill.

As others have observed, the last occasion when the House of Commons debated legislative proposals on this subject was in September 2015. Then, just under nine years ago, the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill was rejected on Second Reading ... by 330 votes to

118. However, this is not an area where opinion is static, and nor is the composition of Parliament a static thing. ...

Tobias Ellwood: ... perhaps there is not the sense of faith that a private Member's Bill would do justice to the details that we have been discussing in depth here today. ...

Laura Farris: I do not for a moment disagree that this is a subject that would require extensive time in the House. ... we are now in the months leading up to a general election, and there is significant Government legislation already planned. However, with those caveats in mind ... if it becomes the clearly expressed will of Parliament to amend or change the criminal law to enable some form of assisted dying, then, of course, as the Prime Minister has made clear, the Government will ensure that the legislation is delivered in a way that is legally effective. ...

col 40WH ... The former Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), said that, when he looked at the data, he saw that people with terminal diagnoses were twice as likely to commit suicide. ... we cannot disregard the fact that there is another route already taken by those with means: when they are at an early stage and have the resources, they can go to the Dignitas clinic. My right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire called it "business class", and we cannot ignore that.

It is also true to say, as many have observed, that the view of the medical profession has shifted or is shifting, with the BMA moving from a position of opposition to one of neutrality. In a "Moral Maze" programme on assisted dying for Radio 4, Michael Buerk said that he had recently chaired a series of medical conferences where doctors tried to reach an agreed position on assisted dying. The majority of doctors there said that they had not gone into the profession to kill people, but at the same time thought that they might choose assisted dying for themselves. The moral ambiguity was not lost on them. ...

We must recognise that this tension exists in the medical profession. ...

col 41WH **Kit Malthouse:** ... One of the things that many people suffering with terminal diseases find so confusing is that the law as it stands is inconsistent and a mess. We have a situation where it is technically illegal to accompany somebody to Switzerland, but upon return, the Crown Prosecution Service has a policy of not prosecuting. We have the example of Mavis Eccleston, who agreed a suicide pact with her elderly husband, but survived. She was prosecuted in court, effectively for murder, but was acquitted, having gone through this dreadful experience. ...

Laura Farris: ... The example was given of Canada, where the law was changed, and the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester, made the point that no change had been implemented; but it is true to say that in 2016, when the Canadian medical assistance in dying legislation was introduced, the threshold was whether the individual suffered from a grievous and irremediable medical condition, where death was reasonably foreseeable. What has been delayed but none the less agreed is removal of the requirement that death be foreseeable. Canada is also mulling over whether the Act should apply to circumstances in which there is no physical disease at all—in other words, where the condition is mental. ...

col 42WH The other issue is evolution of the wider principle. What if a right to die evolves, perhaps slowly and imperceptibly at first, into a duty to die? ... Once we have allowed people to rationalise the quality of their life, how do we avoid it becoming incumbent on them to do so? ...

The final issue was manipulation or coercion. ... a majority of people are well meaning and love their relatives, but implicit in that is that a minority do not. Some people live in dysfunctional families, or may not have loved ones; we must consider the consequences or the potential risks for them, too.

My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) and, I think, the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) talked about the subtle coercion that a person might experience from being made to feel a sense of guilt at the cost that their

illness is imposing on family members, not just in terms of money but in terms of stress and time; they could feel that they are becoming a burden. It is right, necessary and incumbent on us as parliamentarians to contemplate and recognise the enormity of the proposition, given the moral and ethical and medical issues that it engages. ...

col 43WH Finally, I emphasise that end of life and palliative care is of the utmost importance. In the Health and Care Act 2022, the Government added palliative care services to the list of services that an integrated care board must commission. ...

col 44WH Tonia Antoniazzi: ... The hon. Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) talked about the voiceless and the people who do not have a voice in this debate. I am very good friends with the Paralympian Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson and Baroness Ilora Finlay, who hold different views on this matter. They are well informed and well spoken and have been in the media on the matter. That does not mean that this House cannot give any potential legislation the sunlight that it deserves. It is incumbent on us to do so. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-29/debates/B3A72309-26A0-4F8F-9B48-308B063B82E5/AssistedDying>

e-petition 653593: Hold a parliamentary vote on assisted dying, and the Government response, referred to above, can be read at

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/653593>

e-petition 604383: Legalise assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults, referred to above, can be read at

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/604383>

Information about the Scottish Parliament Bill referred to above by Alistair Carmichael and others can be read at

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

Information about the Isle of Man Bill referred to above by Alistair Carmichael can be read at

<https://www.tynwald.org.im/business/bills>

Information about the Channel Islands Bill referred to above by Alistair Carmichael can be read at

<https://www.gov.je/Caring/AssistedDying/pages/assisteddying.aspx>

The Health and Social Care Committee report on Assisted Dying/ Assisted Suicide, referred to above by Tonia Antoniazzi and others can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43582/documents/216484/default/>

The Matthew Parris article referred to above by Andrew Selous and Stephen Timms, can be read at

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-cant-afford-a-taboo-on-assisted-dying-n6p8bfq9k>

The Sonia Sodha article referred to above by Ian Paisley can be read at

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/07/conflicted-legalising-assisted-dying-sonia-sodha>

The DPP guidelines referred to above by Thérèse Coffey can be read at

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/suicide-policy-prosecutors-respect-cases-encouraging-or-assisting-suicide>

The Commons debate on the DPP guidelines referred to above by Thérèse Coffey can be read at

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120327/debtext/120327-0002.htm#12032752000001>

The Moral Maze programme referred to above by Laura Farris can be heard at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001vcqm>

House of Commons Oral Answers

Israel and Antisemitism: Secondary School Education

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [902521] What steps [the Minister] is taking to support education on Israel and antisemitism in secondary schools.

The Minister for Schools (Damian Hinds): I have been horrified and appalled to see the rise in antisemitism in education since 7 October. It is unacceptable and it cannot be tolerated. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to all schools and colleges reminding them of their duties under Prevent, and we are investing £7 million to help tackle antisemitism across education.

Bob Blackman: My right hon. Friend is clearly right that the rise of antisemitism in schools—or anywhere—is absolutely unacceptable. One of the causes is the failure of schools to teach children about the history of Israel and the fact that Jewish people have occupied Israel for over 3,000 years. Indeed, the Balfour declaration set up the creation of the modern state of Israel. As that is not communicated, there is widespread ignorance and people do not believe that Jewish people have occupied that land for so long. Will my right hon. Friend conduct a review of the curriculum to ensure that young people are properly educated about the history of Israel?

Damian Hinds: I appreciate what my hon. Friend says. History is a very important subject for many reasons. Learning about Israel and the wider region can be covered in history, for example in the “challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world since 1901” theme. In general, we do not specify individual historical events in our national curriculum, with the sole exception of the holocaust, as he will know.

Jim Shannon (DUP): I thank the Minister for his positive and helpful response. What discussions has he had with counterparts in the devolved nations, in particular in Northern Ireland, where the two different groups—the nationalists and the Unionists; the Protestants and the Catholics—have been able to develop an understanding on education? They are able to look at each other without the suspicion that may have been there 20 or 30 years ago. Has the Minister had a chance to talk to the devolved nations to ascertain whether introducing compulsory education on the importance of combatting antisemitism is possible, taking the Northern Ireland example as one that works?

Damian Hinds: I always value opportunities to speak to colleagues and counterparts in the devolved Administrations. I believe that we will have another opportunity relatively soon to speak to the hon. Gentleman’s colleagues in Northern Ireland, and I have no doubt that that will be one thing that we will wish to talk about. ...

Carol Monaghan (SNP): It is right that young people can recognise and denounce antisemitism and it is also right that they know something of the history of the region, including the continued expansion of illegal settlements. But I hope the Minister agrees that right-wing rhetoric and Islamophobia also pose a threat to our young people. What steps are being taken to ensure that both antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate are treated with equal severity, especially given some of the Islamophobic remarks that have been made by Members and former Members of his own party?

Damian Hinds: The hon. Lady is right to call out the wickedness of Islamophobia. There have been Islamophobic incidents in schools as well, and Tell MAMA is an important resource in that regard. We will not tolerate anti-Muslim hatred in any form and we will seek to stamp it out whenever and wheresoever it occurs. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-29/debates/5772590A-15D5-4299-9CCF-D55FD0BCE208/IsraelAndAntisemitismSecondarySchoolEducation>

Topical Questions: Education

Julian Lewis (Conservative): In regard to the worrying topic raised earlier of antisemitism and Islamophobia in schools, will Ministers please bear in mind sections 406 and 407 of

the Education Act 1996? The former bans political indoctrination in schools, and the latter says that when political subjects are brought to the attention of pupils, they must be presented in a fair and balanced way.

Damian Hinds: My right hon. Friend issues a timely and important reminder and we are very clear on that with schools. We also, of course, part-fund Educate Against Hate, which has materials available, and I know that schools also seek to go to lengths in most cases to make sure that when tackling controversial current affairs, they are doing so in an entirely impartial way.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-29/debates/C35CD77F-82C6-4766-B5C5-C4DA391D287A/TopicalQuestions#contribution-815A8368-D815-42A3-81DD-0D011E9E4165>

The sections of the Education Act 1996 referred to above can be read at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/406>

and

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/407>

Information about Educate Against Hate, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/>

Topical Questions: Education

Edward Leigh (Conservative): For 14 long, weary years I have been arguing for an end of the faith cap, which is preventing the opening of new Catholic schools and has no proper effect. Does the Secretary of State think that I should keep campaigning and be patient for a bit longer?

Damian Hinds: I have also had an opportunity to speak to my right hon. Friend on occasions about this. The Catholic Church, the Church of England and other denominations play a central part in our education, typically having high-quality schools and typically being popular with parents. We are keen to extend our academies and free schools programme, which has underpinned the huge rise in quality and children's results that we have seen since 2010. No doubt, before too long, we may wish to put the two things closer together.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-29/debates/C35CD77F-82C6-4766-B5C5-C4DA391D287A/TopicalQuestions#contribution-D6FE0181-59C2-4730-AE27-C1B139399418>

House of Commons Written Answers

Academies: Faith Schools

Ian Byrne (Labour) [23353] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to remove the 50% cap on faith-based admissions at (a) academies and (b) free schools.

Damian Hinds: The diversity of schools in this country is one of our education system's most valuable assets and faith schools play a pivotal role in that by providing high-quality school places and choice for parents. This government remains committed in its support for faith schools.

Faith school providers, including churches, are among the largest providers of academy trusts. As the department moves to an education system that is increasingly based on schools being part of strong academy trusts, the department needs to ensure that it is making the best and full use of the talents of all trusts. This includes having mechanism in place for all providers to open new schools.

As the department continues to uphold diversity and quality education for all, it is keeping all policies, including the 50% faith admissions cap for free schools with a faith designation, under review to ensure that this country's education system is

world leading.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-23/23353>

The following four questions all received the same answer

Schools: Equality and Religious Freedom

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22795] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance her Department issues to schools on balancing inclusivity and religious freedoms.

Schools: Religious Practice

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22796] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance her Department issues to non-religious schools on enforcing policies that restrict (a) prayer and (b) other religious practices.

Schools: Discrimination

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22797] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to (a) monitor and (b) tackle potential discrimination in schools against students based on their religious practices.

Schools: Equality and Religious Practice

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour) [22798] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to make an assessment of the adequacy of school policies on (a) religious practices and (b) inclusivity.

Damian Hinds: There is currently no legal requirement for schools to allow their pupils time within the school day to pray upon request, nor are they required to provide any pupil with a physical space, such as a prayer room, to conduct their prayers. It is a matter for individual schools and headteachers to make a decision that is in the interest of their pupils. It is important when considering any requests relating to prayer that they do so in the context of the Equality Act 2010, and their public sector equality duty.

Under the Equality Act 2010 schools must not discriminate against a pupil in a number of respects because of a characteristic protected by the Act, including religion or belief. State-funded schools are also subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). All children and young people must be treated fairly and supported to thrive and reach their potential within a respectful environment.

The department has published guidance for schools on how to comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010, which can be found online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>

This includes specific advice on religion or belief.

The PSED was introduced in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and places a legal obligation on public authorities to consider how their policy or service decisions impacts differently on individuals. The department as a public body is required to give due regard to PSED in its decision making. According to the PSED, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Protected characteristics include religion or belief.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22795>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22796>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22797>
and
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22798>

House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee

Assisted Dying / Assisted Suicide: Government's Response

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44492/documents/221190/default/>

Home Office, and Foreign, commonwealth and Development Office, and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Hate preachers and extremists banned from the UK

... Dangerous hate preachers spewing vile extremism in our communities could be blocked from entering the UK, the government has announced ...

A new taskforce has been set up as part of government action to clamp down on hate and protect the British public. Spanning expertise from the Home Office, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the taskforce will identify prominent extremists overseas who could pose a risk to public safety in the UK.

Hate preachers and extremists will be automatically referred to the Home Office for immigration action, including the cancellation or refusal of visas, should they attempt to travel to the UK. Information will be gathered using our embassy network and using open-source intelligence expertise.

The government will also work in communities across the UK to build a picture of prominent overseas extremists who intend to travel to this country.

UK-based organisations attempting to sponsor visas for dangerous individuals may also face having their sponsorship licence revoked, meaning they can no longer request visas. ...

Home Secretary James Cleverly said: The UK already has some of the most sophisticated mechanisms for stopping foreign extremists from entering the UK, but since 7 October 2023 it has become clear that we must do more. ...

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: It is easier than ever for extremists around the world to spread poisonous, extremist ideologies from afar.

It is therefore right that we use our international expertise and partnerships to fight back against those determined to sow division and to stop them coming to the UK, as we work to uphold the core British values of freedom, democracy, and respect for the rule of law.

Security Minister Tom Tugendhat said: There's no place in the UK for foreign nationals who spread hate and promote extremist ideologies. This taskforce will deliver a step-change in our ability to identify these hateful individuals, and stop them from ever reaching our border.

We will not apologise for defending our country's fundamental values and principles. This new taskforce will help to do exactly that.

To protect the public from extremists already in the country, a new dedicated reporting route will be launched across the Prevent network to report foreign nationals who are sowing division and spreading hate in communities to the Home Office, potentially having them removed from the country.

This will mean the government casts its net far and wide to identify anyone promoting extremist narratives and refer them for immigration action, working across organisations delivering on the ground in communities – including schools, colleges, universities, health

settings, police forces and Local Authorities. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hate-preachers-and-extremists-banned-from-the-uk>

Department for Education

Government to lift cap on faith school places

... A consultation on lifting the 50% cap, which applies to new faith free schools, will be launched alongside proposals on opening special faith-based academies. ...

The proposals mean high performing faith school providers will be able to create more good school places and create strong multi-academy trusts around the country where there is demand.

The Church of England, Catholic Church and other faith school providers have a track record in delivering high quality education and run some of the highest performing schools across the country. ...

The 50% faith cap means that if a new free school with religious character is oversubscribed, it can only prioritise pupils based on faith for 50% of places. At least half of the school's available places must be allocated without reference to faith-based admissions criteria.

As a result, some faith groups have felt unable to open new free schools and felt discouraged about bringing existing schools into academy trusts.

Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said: ... Faith groups run some of the best schools in the country, including in some of the most disadvantaged areas, and it's absolutely right we support them to unleash that potential even further – including through the creation of the first ever faith academies for children with special educational needs. ...

The Church of England's Chief Education Officer, Nigel Genders, said: ... By enabling Church of England special schools, we can serve the needs of more children in more communities, irrespective of their faith background.

With over 50% of schools now being academies it is vital to continue to develop the system to enable schools of all types to be part of a trust with a shared purpose and vision for the common good.

The Right Reverend Marcus Stock, Bishop of Leeds and Chairman of the Catholic Education Service, said: ... Dioceses are well placed to respond to differing local educational demands around the country, including the provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities. ...

Catholic education not only provides a high performing school sector and promotes the formation of children in values and virtues; it is more ethnically diverse than other schools, educates more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds, and builds social cohesion within our communities. ...

Catholic Union Vice President and former Education Secretary, Rt Hon Ruth Kelly, comments: ... Lifting the cap will finally allow Catholics to join other faith groups in being able to open free schools. This decision is well-earned recognition of the success of our schools and a vote of confidence in Catholic education in general.

Former Catholic Union President, Rt Hon Sir Edward Leigh, comments: This is a great victory for Catholic education and common sense. For years we have been trying to make ministers see sense on this and allow Catholic free schools to open. I'm delighted that this Secretary of State has taken the decision to lift the cap. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-lift-cap-on-faith-school-places>

The consultation referred to above can be read at

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/faith-schools-policy-team/faith-school-designation-reforms/>

Scottish Government Press Releases

First Minister to stand down

<https://www.gov.scot/news/first-minister-to-stand-down/>

First Minister speech: Bute House Agreement ends

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/first-minister-speech-bute-house-agreement/>

Welsh Government FoI Response

ATISN 20415 Alleged adoption of APPG definition of Islamophobia by the Welsh Government

... Please state whether or not it is true that you have adopted the APPG definition of Islamophobia (i.e. the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG on British Muslims and promoted by MEND), which is alleged in this video from 14 April 2023 by Sharifa Rahman, the Vice Chair of the Cardiff Working Group for MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development).

If the answer is yes that the Welsh Government did adopt the definition, please provide all correspondence with Sharifah Rahman, MEND and all other organisations that requested you adopt the definition, all meeting agendas, minutes and papers for meetings where the question of whether or not this definition should be adopted was discussed; and whether the Welsh Government sought the advice of the UK government at any point, or the Commission for Countering Extremism, on this matter.

Response: I can confirm that the Welsh Government has not adopted the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) definition of Islamophobia. As such, we do not hold any paper or electronic records confirming the adoption of this definition by Welsh Government. ...

To read the full response see

https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-04/atisn20415_0.pdf

Information about the APPG definition of islamophobia referred to above can be read at
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

TOP

Holocaust

House of Commons Holocaust Memorial Bill Select Committee

MPs publish report on Government's Holocaust Memorial proposals

The Holocaust Memorial Bill would enable a Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre to be built in Victoria Tower Gardens, situated next to Parliament, by removing existing restrictions on the site. ...

[The committee] could not hear petitions on whether there should be a memorial or a learning centre, whether at Victoria Tower Gardens or elsewhere, or whether or not planning permission should be given.

Given the limitations placed on the Committee, and the fact that discussing planning considerations would be out of scope, the Committee has decided not to amend the Bill.

The cross-party Committee of MPs queried the consultation process around the selection of Victoria Tower Gardens, highlighting that a full consultation would have given more

legitimacy around the site decision. It would also have highlighted the impediment presented by the 1900 Act, sooner.

The Committee also expressed concern around the rising costs of the project, which have increased from £50 million to £137 million since the proposal was announced in 2015. ... In light of concerns raised around the risk of terrorism, the Committee also calls on the Government to publish security proposals for the memorial. ...

Commenting on the report, John Stevenson MP, Chair of the Holocaust Memorial Bill Committee, said: "The building of a Holocaust Memorial is an important and sensitive matter, and of great personal significance to many people, particularly those in the Jewish community. We are particularly grateful to the Holocaust survivors who explained their perspectives to us.

"Decision making on such an important national memorial should be clear and transparent. We have heard concerns over rising costs which the Government will have to take into consideration when taking this project forward.

"A major memorial being built in central London, next to the Houses of Parliament, will require security, and the Government needs to come forward with plans for what this will involve."

To read the full press release see

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/679/holocaust-memorial-bill-select-committee/news/201060/mps-publish-report-on-governments-holocaust-memorial-proposals/>

First Special Report of the Holocaust Memorial Bill Select Committee

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44462/documents/221092/default/>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons/Lords/Westminster Hall Debate

See also the Westminster Hall debate "Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience: Khan Review", and Commons oral answers "Israel and Antisemitism: Secondary School Education" that are included in the Home Affairs section above, and Commons written answer 23806 "White Phosphorus" that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Middle East: UN Security Council

Stephen Hammond (Conservative) [902563] What recent steps [the Minister] has taken through the UN Security Council to support progress towards a sustainable peace in the middle east.

The Deputy Foreign Secretary (Andrew Mitchell): The UK played a leading role in securing the passage of Security Council resolutions 2728 and 2720, which set out the urgent demand for expanded humanitarian access.

Stephen Hammond: The way to a sustainable peace, as my right hon. Friend says, is through humanitarian access. Could he please confirm what the UK Government are doing to ensure the full funding of UNRWA again, and what they will do to stop the Hamas terrorist group affecting the supply of aid to Palestinian citizens?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of aid getting in, and UNRWA is a critical organisation in achieving that. He will know that we have

had a chance to look at the Colonna report, and I spoke about this matter with the UN Secretary-General yesterday when I was in New York. We are waiting for the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, which we expect to hear about soon, and we will then reach our conclusions on the best way of getting aid into Gaza. My hon. Friend may rest assured that we are doing everything we can to ensure that aid gets in.

Imran Hussain (Labour): Next Sunday will mark 100 days since the International Court of Justice warned of a genocide in Gaza, yet the Israeli military continues to ignore the legally binding orders of the world's highest court, continues to bomb Gaza indiscriminately and continues to block vital humanitarian aid, all while the UK stands by and lets the right-wing Netanyahu Cabinet blatantly undermine the court's legitimacy.

Can the Minister explain to me just what blatantly disregarding international courts and openly violating UN ceasefire resolutions means for the rules-based order he claims to uphold, because to me, my constituents, the Palestinians and countless persecuted groups across the world, frankly these rules are now not worth the paper they are written on?

Andrew Mitchell: What the hon. Gentleman says—the way he reflects on what the ICJ said—is not accurate. The ICJ called for hostage release, for more aid into Gaza and for Israel not to commit acts that violate the rights of Palestinians. The Government agree with those three points.

Julian Lewis (Conservative): Will the Deputy Foreign Secretary take the message back to his boss that the insertion of British troops on the ground in Gaza will simply play into the hands of those who wish to divert attention further away from the existential conflict between Russia and Ukraine? Does he share my sadness that there is not a single mention of Ukraine in any of the questions on today's Order Paper?

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will know that the Government are absolutely committed to doing everything we can to help Ukraine. ...

Tommy Sheppard (SNP): The creation of a sustainable peace in the middle east will require the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. The Deputy Foreign Secretary will know that Prime Minister Netanyahu is now implacably opposed to the creation of such a state, so what will the UK do to oblige Israel to comply with the international peace process? Does he think a sustainable peace is possible so long as Mr Netanyahu remains in power?

Andrew Mitchell: Many voices are heard within Israel, but the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the predominant view of the region, of the United Nations and of the regional powers, the great powers and the British Government is that a two-state solution is required, with both Palestine and Israel living behind secure borders in peace and safety. ...

David Lammy (Labour): More than 30,000 Palestinians are dead, more than 100 Israeli hostages are still unaccounted for and Gaza is facing famine. The war must end now with an immediate ceasefire. That needs both sides to agree. It was Hamas, not Israel, who rejected the last internationally brokered ceasefire deal. Now a new offer is on the table, and Hamas now have the power to stop the fighting. Does the Minister agree that Hamas should accept this deal and avert a catastrophic continuation of this war?

Andrew Mitchell: Yes. The right hon. Gentleman makes a very good point and, although these negotiations are fluid at the moment, he is right to say that Hamas should accept the deal that has been put on the table. ...

Brendan O'Hara (SNP): The Minister knows that securing a sustainable peace will require a massive aid and rebuilding programme, in which UNRWA will have, and must have, a crucial part to play. Indeed, he has previously acknowledged that UNRWA has a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza. Why, then, having assured this House that he will come to a decision on the future of UNRWA's funding when he received Catherine Colonna's interim report, has he sat on that report for 10 days and said absolutely nothing

about restoring funding? He now seems to be setting us up for even further delay. It is simply not good enough. Will he now tell us when this Government will make a decision on UNRWA's funding?

Andrew Mitchell: We have been very clear that we are waiting for not one but two reports. As I say, I discussed this matter yesterday with the UN Secretary-General. We know very well, as the hon. Gentleman does, that the assets UNRWA has in terms of logistics, vehicles, warehouses and so forth, are essential for the supply of humanitarian relief within Gaza. We are considering the matter carefully. He will also know that Britain is not currently in deficit in its funding; we are fully funded at this point for UNRWA. It has also received additional resources, including private resources as well as new Governments coming in to support it. We will consider carefully both those two reports in full and then make a decision, and I will come back to the House to inform it when that decision is reached.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/84743359-C95C-4A30-BB73-04BD49C2552E/MiddleEastUNSecurityCouncil>

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))

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))

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

Mohammad Yasin (Labour) [902567] What steps [the Minister] is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Ian Levy (Conservative) [902570] What steps [the Minister] is taking to help get more aid into Gaza. (902570)

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) [902576] What recent assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Naz Shah (Labour) [902583] What steps [the Minister] is taking to help improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The Deputy Foreign Secretary (Andrew Mitchell): We have trebled our aid commitment in the past year and we are doing all we can to get more aid to Gaza by land, air and sea.

Mohammad Yasin: The Colonna review was given no evidence to back up claims by the Israeli Government that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attacks. Other countries have already restored funding to the aid agency, so it can continue its work feeding tens of thousands of people who are starving in Gaza, including innocent babies who are dying without milk. Will the Minister commit to refunding today? Or will he continue to risk UK complicity in using famine as a weapon of war?

Andrew Mitchell: I have set out the process by which we will judge how and when to restore funding to UNRWA, but the situation has improved in recent weeks. The hon. Member will have seen that fuel for bakeries has been restored. We are pressing for the activation of the water pipeline and, over the past week, we have been averaging more than 200 trucks each day. Progress has been made, but there needs to be a lot more progress, and Britain will continue to press for it.

Ian Levy: When Putin invaded Ukraine, the people of Blyth, Cramlington and Seaton Valley came together and generously gave what they could spare. With help from local companies ... we were able to ensure that aid reached those who had lost their homes and their belongings. What plans does my right hon. Friend's Department have in place to get aid from the UK to Gaza?

Andrew Mitchell: I pay tribute to the good people of Blyth, Cramlington and Seaton Valley for their generosity, and to my hon. Friend for helping to channel that goodwill so constructively. His constituents will want to support reputable non-governmental organisations and charities working to support humanitarian relief in Gaza.

Yasmin Qureshi: Israel has forced more than 1 million Palestinians to flee to Rafah, claiming it to be a safe zone, yet for months the Israeli military have been bombing Palestinians there relentlessly and, according to the UN, killing mostly women and children. Now it is planning a ground invasion that will lead to carnage. Does the Minister agree that President Biden could stop this with one phone call, and will he press him to do so?

Andrew Mitchell: President Biden has been very heavily engaged in this matter. As the hon. Member knows, both the American and British Governments have pressed Israel not to launch an all-out assault on Rafah for the reasons that she set out. The shadow Foreign Secretary rightly said that he hopes that Hamas will accept the current deal on the table, and I agree with him.

Naz Shah: An Israel ground invasion in Rafah is probable within days, leading to 1.5 million displaced Palestinians with no safe place to shelter. Children in Gaza have been starved at the fastest rate that the world has ever seen, and Members across the House, including myself, have come here time and again asking for something to be done in terms of delivering aid and pushing for a ceasefire. Time and again, the Minister says that we are trying, trying, trying, but clearly trying is not working. What will the Government do to move the dial and stop children dying?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Member will have seen the 6 April maritime announcement and she will know that Britain is ramping up the delivery of aid by land, sea and air. She will, I hope, be aware that we have a naval ship standing by with £9.7 million of aid and logistics equipment. There have also been 10 air drops already from the Royal Air Force; an 11th one is expected today. Therefore, the British Government are doing everything they possibly can to move the dial, as she requests.

Kit Malthouse (Conservative): As the Minister will know, it is not only Governments and NGOs supporting Palestinians across Israel, the west bank and Gaza, but a lot of charities. I have been contacted by one such charity, ABCD, which operates a centre for disabled Palestinian children in the Nur Shams refugee camp. It tells me that its centre has been raided and destroyed not once, but several times, by the Israeli army—not by settlers. What more can the Government do to protect the facilities and personnel of British charities operating in the Palestinian territories?

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will know that we do everything that we can in that respect, but if he is able to give me some specific details about that particular charity and what has befallen it, I will look into it.

Theresa Villiers (Conservative): The Prime Minister has identified getting aid in and getting hostages out as two key priorities for the UK Government. Israel is facilitating aid getting into Gaza by air, land and sea, with 468 trucks entering the area in a single day. We are seeing real progress on aid; when will we see progress on hostages, too?

Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to see breathing space so that we can get the hostages out and more aid in; in spite of what she says, the aid that is getting in at the moment is not sufficient. That is precisely the policy of the British Government, and we will continue to pursue it with all vigour. ...

Wayne David (Labour): Given that the Colonna report makes clear that donors should have confidence in UNRWA and that Australia, France, Germany, Sweden, Canada, Japan and Denmark have all restored funding, and with Gaza facing famine, I ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary again: when will the Government do what Labour has called for and restore full funding to UNRWA?

Andrew Mitchell: As I have set out, we are looking at all those reports and we will

make a decision in our own time. Britain is not falling short in that respect, because we are currently fully funded on all the earlier commitments we made. We will look at the Office of Internal Oversight Services report and the UNRWA reaction to it. We are aware of non-traditional donors and private donations coming in, and UNRWA is fully funded until the end of May. When we reach our conclusion, I will be sure to inform the House of it.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/1538BEC0-8493-4C94-9D12-F43404FC4F45/GazaHumanitarianSituation>

The maritime announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-boost-aid-support-for-gaza-by-sea>

Strategic Export Licences: Israel

Owen Thompson (SNP) [902568] If the Government will revoke strategic export licences to Israel.

The Deputy Foreign Secretary (Andrew Mitchell): As required by the UK's robust arms export control regime, the Foreign Secretary has reviewed the most recent advice about the situation in Gaza and Israel's conduct of its military campaign. The British position on export licences is unchanged, but we will keep that position under review.

Owen Thompson: Given that the very purpose of the UK's arms export licence criteria is to apply a precautionary principle to arms sales to prevent them from fuelling future atrocities, and given the extensive evidence of potential war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law by Israel in Gaza, surely it is clear that the UK export licensing system is not working. Does the Minister agree with me and the countless Midlothian constituents who have been in touch with me that the Government should now suspend the transfer of arms to Israel in order to prevent future atrocities, and does he agree that UK Government policy allows for that decision to be made at the discretion of Ministers, outside the failed export licensing system?

Andrew Mitchell: Our position on the arms embargo is consistent with most of our like-minded partners, who have not taken any decision to suspend existing arms export licences to Israel. It would be an odd decision for us to take when we have used our own military weaponry to defend Israel from the attacks by Iran.

Michael Ellis (Conservative): Exports are linked to law, of course, and the White House said yesterday that the International Criminal Court does not have jurisdiction over Israel because, rather like the USA, it is not a signatory to the statute of Rome, which set up the Court. More than three years ago the then British Prime Minister wrote an open letter saying that the UK does not accept that the ICC has jurisdiction, again because of the statute of Rome and the absence of sovereignty over the situation in the region. Can the Deputy Foreign Secretary confirm that that is still the position of His Majesty's Government?

Andrew Mitchell: I can tell my right hon. and learned Friend that we do not think that the ICC has that jurisdiction, as was set out in the letter to which he referred, but it is a matter for the ICC ultimately to reach a determination on that.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/13FF95B5-1B62-46A1-8F35-A26D3BF13039/StrategicExportLicencesIsrael>

The letter referred to above can be read at

<https://cfoi.co.uk/prime-minister-boris-johnson-confirms-uk-opposition-to-icc-investigation-into-israel/>

Conflict in Gaza: Iran

Antony Higginbotham (Conservative) [902571] What assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of Iran's role in the conflict in Gaza.

The Deputy Foreign Secretary (Andrew Mitchell): Iran's support for proscribed groups operating in Gaza, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, compromises our efforts towards a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza.

Antony Higginbotham: Iran continues to operate in violation of the joint comprehensive plan of action. Its nuclear programme is way beyond anything needed for purely peaceful processes. However, it does not end there: Iran is threatening journalists on UK streets, and its proxies in Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis continue to inflict tragedy on the region. What is my right hon. Friend's assessment of whether the JCPOA is still fit for purpose?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Alongside international partners, we are prepared to use all options available to tackle the difficulties that he describes, including triggering the UN snapback and ending the JCPOA if necessary.

Philippa Whitford (SNP): As probably the only Member who has actually lived and worked in Gaza, I must say that I have been heartbroken over the past six months by what I am hearing from friends and colleagues there about the almost total destruction of the healthcare system and the impact of widespread starvation on their patients. With the UK having defunded the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, still supplying arms to Israel, and often defending Netanyahu's policies, is the Minister not anxious that the UK Government are undermining international law itself?

Andrew Mitchell: No. The hon. Lady will have seen how, in respect of UN Security Council resolutions 2720 and 2728, Britain's diplomacy worked to move people into a common position. We are very clear about the importance of getting aid into Gaza and getting the hostages out, and all British policy is bent, without fear or favour, towards achieving that.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/8271CA9B-49F2-4076-B353-AF8824BCF865/ConflictInGazaIran>

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))

Rafah: Military Offensive

George Galloway (Workers Party of Britain) [902573] If the Government will make an assessment of the potential impact of a military offensive in Rafah on the humanitarian situation in that area.

The Deputy Foreign Secretary (Andrew Mitchell): We are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military offensive in Rafah. We need an immediate humanitarian pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a permanent, sustainable ceasefire.

George Galloway: The Foreign Secretary is fortunate to have such an able deputy, which makes it all the more difficult to understand the inherent complacency in that answer. We are hours away from a bloodbath that will make Falluja pale into insignificance—it will be the worst bloodbath seen in the world since the second world war. Some 1.6 million people, most of them women and children, are 72 hours away from a full-scale invasion. The Minister keeps saying that we are going to press Israel; what are the Government going to do about it if it happens?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman and I first entered this House on the same day, nearly 40 years ago, and it is no surprise to see him back in his place. It has to be said that throughout that time his views have been remarkably consistent. Given the number of civilians sheltering in Rafah, it is not easy to see how such an offensive could be compliant with international humanitarian law in the current circumstances, and on his overall point, I hope he will recognise that the British Government are doing everything we can to prevent the circumstances he has described.

Mark Logan (Conservative): “Sustainable calm” is the latest buzzword, but the fighting simply has to stop. In the past two days, Palestinian President Abbas has said that in order for there to be sustainable calm or a ceasefire, the United States must give a warning to Israel. What warnings have the UK Government given to Israel when it comes to a possible ground invasion in Rafah?

Andrew Mitchell: I refer my hon. Friend to the comments I made earlier. He will know that the British and American Governments have been working in lockstep to prevent the situation he has described.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/B090FCC7-01DE-459B-9D8F-0B0ADE97D1FE/RafahMilitaryOffensive>

The comments referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/1538BEC0-8493-4C94-9D12-F43404FC4F45/GazaHumanitarianSituation#contribution-810398F4-0BEC-4EE4-8843-858AF0AEB70C>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Tonia Antoniazzi (Labour): Conditions in Gaza are desperate and civilians are suffering. It is now an immense issue. Water has still not been fully switched back on and famine is taking hold. The World Food Programme reports that 90% of people in northern Gaza are living on less than a meal a day. Will the right hon. Gentleman clearly outline what his Government are doing to alleviate the threat of famine and prevent its further spread?

Andrew Mitchell: We are trying to make sure that the water is restored, as I set out earlier, and we are championing the provision of aid by land, sea and air, and I set out the help we have received from the Royal Air Force in that respect. But at the end of the day, the right way to get aid into Gaza is by road and we are pressing in every way we can to ensure that that access is restored.

Luke Evans (Conservative) [902591] Following on from that discussion about getting aid into Gaza, sometimes we need novel ways of thinking about doing that, so what conversations is my right hon. Friend having with other countries and counterparts about opening a new maritime corridor if the road routes are failing?

Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We are working closely with a number of partner Governments, including the United States of America, Cyprus and the United Nations. Maritime discussions include corridor planning for the delivery of UK aid and our package of support including equipment and the use of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Cardigan Bay.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/F359759A-A03F-40C4-81F3-28FCB0359C67/TopicalQuestions#contribution-9D5BB915-1773-4A82-86FD-5B57C4F0EE15>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Anna Firth (Conservative) [902594] Hamas are rightly an internationally proscribed organisation, yet the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which funds and supports Hamas, is not. Should it not be?

David Rutley: The list of proscribed organisations is kept under review, but we do not comment on whether any particular organisation is being considered for proscription. However, the Government have taken measures to counter the threat from Iran, including sanctioning the IRGC in its entirety.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/F359759A-A03F-40C4-81F3-28FCB0359C67/TopicalQuestions#contribution-3AFBC3EB-F4DA-482C-8193-90E5D019D012>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Rob Butler (Conservative) [902595] Many people in the Aylesbury constituency are understandably concerned about the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. They condemn the appalling actions of Hamas, but at the same time want the UK to do everything possible to get more aid in. Can my right hon. Friend let them know what further plans he has to provide more aid directly, especially with our friends in the region, including Egypt, Qatar and Jordan?

Andrew Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his thoughts and ideas, which he came and spoke to me about last week. He was conveying the views of the mosques in Aylesbury. We are pursuing many of the ideas that he set out, as he knows, especially on meeting the evident humanitarian needs that have rightly preoccupied the House today.

Rupa Huq (Labour) [902589] One month since UN Security Council resolution 2728 passed with UK support, what are our Government doing to bring about the immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the compliance with international law, the release of hostages and the passage of aid that it calls for? What are the consequences for non-compliance, apart from more death and destruction?

Andrew Mitchell: As the hon. Lady knows, UN resolution 2728, which was passed on 25 March, reflected the international consensus behind the UK's position about the importance of getting aid in and the hostages out. That is what we are bending every sinew to achieve.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/F359759A-A03F-40C4-81F3-28FCB0359C67/TopicalQuestions#contribution-60926BDE-59BF-4910-9A79-B3A06BC66839>

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))

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

George Galloway (Workers Party of Britain) [902590] When the International Court of Justice, almost 100 days ago, sent Israel for trial, plausibly on charges of genocide, the British Government called it a foreign court. What attitude will the Government take if, as is widely reported, the British King's Counsel chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court issues an arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu?

Andrew Mitchell: I think the hon. Gentleman is speculating in an extraordinary manner. What the Court said at the time was that the hostages should be released, that there should be more aid into Gaza and that Israel should not commit acts that violate the rights of Palestinians. That is where the Court rests at this point, and we must wait for further events.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/F359759A-A03F-40C4-81F3-28FCB0359C67/TopicalQuestions#contribution-EB96E37E-8755-4FD2-B723-47D7B4890A60>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Chris Stephens (SNP) [902592] As of 9 April, eight field hospitals are reportedly active inside the Gaza strip, with some operating at 265% of their capacity and with a shortage

of medication and supplies. What are the UK Government doing to help facilitate medical evacuations, particularly of children?

Andrew Mitchell: We have worked extensively with our partners in the Gulf on evacuations, and Britain is doing a great deal through our medical support for the field hospital we have in Gaza as well as to support other humanitarian and medical activities, which are so vital there.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/F359759A-A03F-40C4-81F3-28FCB0359C67/TopicalQuestions#contribution-FE716049-023F-4E71-ABF1-38C7CF3768DF>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Andy Slaughter (Labour): Spain, Norway and Ireland are ready jointly to recognise Palestine as a state within weeks. Four other European countries look likely to follow suit, and France recently voted to admit Palestine as a full member of the UN. Is it not time that the UK Government joined their European partners in recognising Palestine?

Andrew Mitchell: As we have made clear, recognition of a Palestinian state cannot come at the beginning of the process, but it does not have to come at the end.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/F359759A-A03F-40C4-81F3-28FCB0359C67/TopicalQuestions#contribution-18F145F9-4223-4A2D-BAE5-8A48358C5292>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Richard Burgon (Labour): Israel's deliberate and wilful starvation of Gaza is a war crime, yet the Government deflect all questions on UNRWA funding by saying that it runs until the end of April. We are here—today is the last day of April. If the Government do not restore UNRWA funding, are they not aiding and abetting Israeli war crimes?

Andrew Mitchell: I have made very clear the Government's position on UNRWA. We are in a process, and after it has been completed I will report to the House.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/F359759A-A03F-40C4-81F3-28FCB0359C67/TopicalQuestions#contribution-B01CD640-F677-4350-92CC-C8C1A3263670>

UK Armed Forces in Middle East

col 27 **John Healey (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the UK armed forces in the middle east.

The Minister for Armed Forces (Leo Docherty): ... The UK has provided assistance to our allies and partners in the region. The Ministry of Defence has provided support to facilitate the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's response to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, and we continue to work with the FCDO. Our armed forces personnel have played a critical role in working to establish more routes for vital humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza and in the delivery of support, in co-ordination with the US and our international allies and partners. To date, the UK has conducted nine airdrops as part of the Jordanian-led mission, dropping more than 85 tonnes of vital humanitarian aid of prepackaged halal meals, water, flour, baby milk formula and rice to Gaza.

UK military planners have been embedded with the US operational team to jointly develop the safest and most effective maritime humanitarian aid route. RFA Cardigan Bay is sailing from Cyprus to support the US pier initiative to enable the delivery of significantly more lifesaving aid into Gaza. The UK Hydrographic Office has also shared analysis of the Gazan shore with US planners to support the

initiative. The RAF also sent additional aircraft to the region to protect our allies and support de-escalation, culminating in the UK armed forces shooting down a number of Iranian attack drones. The House will understand that for operational security reasons, I cannot comment on the specifics of that activity.

As stated by the Prime Minister on 15 April, “Our aim is to support stability and security because that is right for the region, and because although the middle east is thousands of miles away, it has a direct effect on our security and prosperity at home, so we are working urgently with our allies to de-escalate the situation and prevent further bloodshed.”—[[Official Report, 15 April 2024; Vol. 748, c. 23.](#)]

We are directing all our diplomatic efforts to that end. ... We are pressing for a sustainable ceasefire that will enable the release of hostages and provide the people of Gaza with the essential assistance and humanitarian aid that they need.

col 28 John Healey: ... our UK armed forces are reinforcing regional stability, protecting international shipping, defending partner countries and delivering desperately needed aid to Gaza. We are proud of their professionalism, and across the House we pay tribute to their work, but the agonies of the Palestinians in Gaza are extreme. Children are starving, families are dying, and famine and disease are taking hold. Humanitarian help must flood into Palestinian hands, so we welcomed the ninth RAF airdrop last week, but why has there been only one sea shipment of UK aid in more than six months, and none this year? What are the Government doing to open up Ashdod port?

We welcome the new role for RFA Cardigan Bay in helping to build the temporary pier. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary is demonstrating that it provides vital naval support. ... Weekend reports suggest that UK troops could be deployed to deliver aid on the ground in Gaza. Will the Minister confirm those plans? How will the Defence Secretary report to the House, and ensure that Parliament has a say, on any such deployment?

The Defence Secretary seems to be doing the bare minimum on the diplomatic front. Why has he made only one visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 7 October? We need an immediate ceasefire now, hostages released now, and unimpeded aid now. We need a political route to securing a long-term two-state settlement. Where the Government pursue these aims, they will have Labour’s fullest support.

Leo Docherty: ... Clearly, the deployment of RFA Cardigan Bay is leaning into the prospect of a far greater flow of maritime aid through the Cyprus humanitarian corridor, which will seek to substantially uplift that delivered so far. That will have an important impact on the extent to which Ashdod can come into play. We make the point regularly to our Israeli colleagues that opening Ashdod would be a critical enabler of a dramatically increased flow of aid, which is seriously needed. ...

I will not comment on speculation that there might be a ground role for UK forces. It would not be right for me to comment on speculation. We are very clear about the current remit. RFA Cardigan Bay is there to provide living support for the US troops involved in the construction and operational delivery of the JLOTS—joint logistics over the shore—platform. ...

... the Defence Secretary ... is a busy man ... His visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories was important; his is a global role. To categorise his one visit as disproportionate, or a lack of interest, is uncharitable to say the least.

In all earnestness, we share the right hon. Gentleman’s view that a far greater flow of aid and humanitarian support is contingent on a sustainable ceasefire. This House will know that we call on Hamas to lay down their arms and release the hostages; that is the surest route to finding that sustainable ceasefire. ...

Jeremy Quin (Conservative): I commend the Government’s determination to get aid into Gaza, and I commend the work of the RAF, RFA Cardigan Bay, UK planners and the Hydrographic Office. As the Minister is aware, I would not expect him to comment on speculation, but some of the best laid and best intentioned plans can run into problems. Can he assure the House that we would only ever contemplate putting UK boots on the

pier if appropriate force protection was in place?

Leo Docherty: ... He is absolutely right that it would be improper for me, as a Government Minister, to comment on that speculation. ...

Dave Doogan (SNP): Can the Minister confirm that the US maritime humanitarian aid corridor is required only because the Israeli Government will not allow the port of Ashdod to be used to receive the appropriate amount of aid for northern Gaza? Are the UK Government content with that stranglehold over the people of Gaza? The working assumption is that a nation will be driving trucks of aid across this American facility, but will that nation be the UK? If it is, what is the risk assessment if UK troops potentially step up for an operation that goes where American troops fear to tread? Getting aid into Gaza to alleviate the unspeakable torment of the Palestinians must be a good thing, and the professionalism and capability of UK troops is beyond question, but are Ministers seriously suggesting that the best that Euro-Atlantic allies can muster is British troops? Have Ministers forgotten how British forces operated in Palestine in the Arab rebellion of 1936? The Palestinians have not. Any risk calculation must command more robust analysis, rigour and humanitarian ambition, not simply UK Ministers' ambitions for positive headlines.

Leo Docherty: ... we are leaning into the Cypriot and Jordanian humanitarian efforts. That is very important, because those efforts need to be grounded in the region. Solutions to the problems of the region lie in the region, but clearly we have a key enabling role, along with the US. The hon. Gentleman invites me to comment on speculation in the media, which I will not do. Nor will I dwell on his reference to the history lesson from 1936. We should be upbeat and proud of the way we have significantly leaned into the delivery of humanitarian aid. That is a key component of stabilisation, and of any prospect of peace in Gaza.

col 30 **Julian Lewis (Conservative):** One of the main strategic aims of Iran, Russia's ally, in supporting what Hamas did in October last year was to suck western powers into the middle eastern theatre, thereby diverting them from Russia's existential conflict with Ukraine. May I urge the Minister not to comment on the suggestion that we might have British boots on the ground in the Gaza strip, but to take the message back to the Secretary of State that this would be a completely insane idea? It would be far better to have moderate neighbouring Arab states deal with any distribution of aid that we have facilitated as a result of the viable RAF and sea power that we have rightly exercised.

Leo Docherty: My right hon. Friend is right: the answers to the humanitarian and political challenges in the region lie within the region. I entirely agree with his analysis. ...

Suella Braverman (Conservative): I was in Israel earlier this year and met senior Israel Defence Forces personnel, who assured me that they are doing everything in their power, and are working with allies, to increase aid to Gaza. It is the right thing to do, and we must continue those efforts, but it is patent that Hamas are obstructing the distribution of aid within Gaza—another reason why we need to support Israel in defeating Hamas. Will the Minister assure the House that if and when Israel goes into Rafah, where several Hamas battalions remain, and where senior Hamas operatives and the hostages are based, UK support will remain resolute and steadfast, as we support Israel in finishing the job and eliminating Hamas?

col 31 **Leo Docherty:** We are clear-eyed in our assessment of Hamas: we regard them as a terrorist organisation that has prosecuted an atrocity. We call on them to lay down their arms and to release the hostages. That is the precondition for any kind of meaningful and sustainable ceasefire.

Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat): ... Will the Minister assure us that if the Government proposed using British troops on the ground in Gaza, they would first grant this House a debate and a vote on the matter?

Leo Docherty: ... Ministers and the Government will remain fully accountable to

this House.

Bob Stewart (Independent): ... I am slightly worried that if our armed forces open fire in the middle east, which they have done, a foreign country will, at some future date, put them before an international court and charge them. I hope the Minister will declare that such a thing will never happen.

Leo Docherty: ... He should be assured, as should the House, that our forces in the region operate with the full force of the law behind them on the basis of collective self-defence.

Zarah Sultana (Labour): Israeli media are reporting that the International Criminal Court could be about to issue an arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu and other top Israeli officials for the litany of war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza. It is further reported that the United States Government are working to prevent justice from being done and to stop the ICC issuing arrest warrants. Does the Minister agree, after more than 34,000 Palestinians—women, men and children—have been slaughtered in Gaza and Israeli bombings have obliterated and decimated entire Palestinian neighbourhoods, that Benjamin Netanyahu should be held to account for his horrific crimes?

Leo Docherty: ... I regard that as out of scope.

col 32 Robert Jenrick (Conservative): Hamas are a terrorist organisation that hate the United Kingdom and everything that we stand for. It would therefore be deeply unwise for the UK to commit British servicemen and women, whether on the ground or on the pier in Gaza. It is for precisely that reason that the White House has categorically ruled this out. Will the Minister take the opportunity to do the same, so that we can reassure our constituents that we do not make an inadvertent mistake, and that British troops will continue doing what they should be doing, which is facilitating the complete eradication of Hamas?

Leo Docherty: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend's analysis and his comments about Hamas. Other than that, of course I will not comment on speculation in the media.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op): What discussions has the Minister had regarding UN security forces accompanying trucks to enable them to move into Gaza in the light of the impediments they are facing, and also rebuilding infrastructure so that trucks can travel across the country to deliver crucial medical and other humanitarian aid?

Leo Docherty: A great deal of energy from Ministers and officials is going into the ongoing discussion about how to operationalise the greater flow rate of humanitarian aid going into Gaza ...

James Sunderland (Conservative): ... could he again confirm to the House that the requisite force protection will be factored into all operational level planning, and also that it is not beyond the realms of possibility that the UN could be coerced into taking a more active role in Gaza?

Leo Docherty: ... I can give him that assurance in relation to the deployment of RFA Cardigan Bay.

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): Some 34,000 people are already dead in Gaza, many are dying now in Rafah from wholly preventable conditions such as measles because of a lack of sanitation and medical care, and the Israeli bombardment is still going on. That is the biggest problem for getting aid in. What pressure is the Minister putting on the Israeli Government to cease the bombardment of Gaza, to ensure the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, and to ensure that we will not be deploying British troops anywhere on the ground in Gaza, the west bank or any other part of the region and that instead we will search for peace and for justice for the people of Palestine?

Leo Docherty: The right hon. Gentleman asks about the protection of civilians. We continue to make the point to our Israeli friends that they must seek to protect civilian lives, but of course the root cause of this is the atrocity committed by Hamas. For peace to be secured, all that would have to happen is for Hamas to lay down

their arms and release the hostages.

col 33 Stephen Crabb (Conservative): Iran continues to present one of the most pressing and dangerous threats to the middle east and to global stability. With the increasing emphasis on the need for an integrated defence strategy comprising different nations of the region, does my hon. Friend agree that there is an ongoing, vital role for British forces to play, as they did so ably on the night of 13 and 14 April?

Leo Docherty: I wholeheartedly agree, and we should pay tribute to those who courageously played an active role in that defence of our collective security. Undoubtedly, British armed forces have a sustained and hugely important role to play in bringing peace and stability right across the region.

Nadia Whittome (Labour): The UN reports that 80% of all those in the world facing imminent famine are located in Gaza. With over 200 humanitarian workers killed by Israeli forces since October, a ceasefire is essential for the effective delivery of aid and for preventing famine in both the short term and the long term. How can the Government justify their continued refusal to back calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire?

Leo Docherty: The hon. Lady is correct that a ceasefire is needed, as it is the way to assure the flow of aid that Gazans need. The precondition of that ceasefire is for Hamas to lay down their arms and to release the hostages.

Andrew Percy (Conservative): I was in Israel on the night of the Iran attacks, and I saw the jets in the sky, David's Sling and Iron Dome dealing with the ballistic missiles as they came in. I felt very proud to know that our forces were involved, and the Israelis were very grateful for our activity.

One group of people in Gaza who are not being provided with aid or proper medical checks are, of course, the hostages. Last Monday, I spoke to the parent of 23-year-old Hersh Goldberg-Polin, who was last seen on 7 October being bundled into the back of a truck with his arm and hand missing, having had a grenade thrown into his shelter. A video was released on Wednesday, and it was the first sight of him. He looked in a very distressed state. Can the Minister assure me that we will continue to do everything we can, militarily and through intelligence, to help Israel to locate these hostages?

Leo Docherty: I can, of course, give my hon. Friend that assurance. It is a highly sensitive subject, and if he would care to raise the case with me individually, we will do what we can to follow up.

Matt Western (Labour): Two months ago, the House passed Labour's motion calling for an immediate ceasefire. We believe that Hamas must immediately release their hostages, but Israel must also look at releasing its prisoners. There has to be an immediate and unimpeded supply of aid into Gaza, but I am really concerned about UK forces getting involved. We should rely absolutely on aid being delivered by the charities and voluntary organisations on the ground. What is the Defence Secretary doing with our allies and regional partners to secure an immediate ceasefire?

col 34 Leo Docherty: We continue to make the point that Hamas must lay down their arms and release the hostages. That is the precondition for peace.

Robert Halfon (Conservative): The key problem, as my hon. Friend will know, is that Hamas and Islamic Jihad are appropriating aid meant for the Palestinians. What steps are our armed forces taking to ensure that aid gets to those who really need it, not the terrorist networks? What steps are they taking against Hamas's terrorist tunnels under the Egyptian border? British armed forces could play a significant role in working with Israel to dismantle the tunnel networks.

Leo Docherty: My right hon. Friend asks a very good question, and a huge amount of effort is going into this. We are energetically leaning into the prospect of a greater degree of aid flowing through the Cypriot and Jordanian humanitarian corridors, and the JLOTS temporary pier capability could be an absolute game changer.

Andrew Bridgen (Independent): The Government continue to provide huge sums of taxpayers' money for arms and weapons for Ukraine, but minimal funding for humanitarian

aid for Gaza. Does the Minister believe that the UK public share the Government's spending priorities?

Leo Docherty: I believe they do, yes.

Mark Logan (Conservative): Despite some positive noises coming out of the middle east about a truce ... it is deeply worrying to see reports of an increasingly likely ground offensive in the southern city of Rafah. The Minister spoke about not wanting to see any more bloodshed, but if there is a ground offensive, more blood will be shed. What are our Government, the Ministry of Defence in particular, doing to avoid bloodshed happening in Rafah and to prepare for different scenarios?

Leo Docherty: We always make the point to our Israeli colleagues that the protection of civilian life is imperative. We acknowledge that Israel has an absolute right to self-defence, and we hope that Hamas will recognise that the path to peace lies in laying down their arms and releasing the hostages.

Jonathan Edwards (Independent): My understanding is that the British Government do not support the ground offensive by the Israeli military in Rafah. Will they therefore use all the leverage at their disposal, including withdrawing arms export licences, if the Israeli Government act against British policy?

Leo Docherty: We have one of the world's toughest arms export regimes, of which we should be very proud. ...

col 35 Jim Shannon (DUP): ... It is important that we support innocent victims who cannot protect themselves. The UK's role in the middle east is much appreciated, acclaimed and respected. Does the Minister agree that in response to recent increased Iranian threats, for instance with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps being responsible for Hamas terrorist attacks across Gaza and the broader middle east, we must do whatever we can within our budget to encourage de-escalation and to try to prevent further attacks by Iran and its supporters?

Leo Docherty: I agree with the hon. Gentleman ...

Flick Drummond (Conservative): We talk about 500 trucks a day because that was the pre-war number, but that was when Gaza had a relatively functioning economy and an agricultural sector to back it up. Therefore, more than 400 trucks will be needed, by land and sea, and so I thank the armed forces for their help in delivering aid and in helping to build the pier. What pressure are we putting on Israel to get more aid quickly delivered by land, which is the best and quickest way of doing it, and on the use of UNRWA in northern Gaza, as it has the most effective system to get aid to the right places quickly?

Leo Docherty: My hon. Friend is correct: we do need to increase that flow. What would be a game changer is opening the port of Ashdod, and we continue to make that point forcefully to our colleagues.

Michael Ellis (Conservative): Does my hon. Friend agree that His Majesty's armed forces could be providing any humanitarian support, now or in the future, only with Israel's total co-operation and that it should be recognised for that? Has he noted also that Israel's Iron Dome and Arrow 3 defensive systems, among other things, would, in effect, be part of the protection of His Majesty's and other allied forces? Does he agree that that makes even more nonsense of the anti-Israel interests' call for an arms embargo against Israel, because if allied forces, including His Majesty's forces, were to be acting in the region, they would be looking for support from Israel itself?

Leo Docherty: My right hon. and learned Friend makes a very good point.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-29/debates/FF6E9B44-5ADE-4718-89CF-CEB6F5612A22/UKArmedForcesInMiddleEast>

House of Commons Points of Order

Chi Onwurah (Labour): ... During the urgent question on the humanitarian situation in Gaza on 17 April, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), speaking on behalf of the Foreign Secretary, said that the Government wanted an “independent review” of the terrible killing of British aid workers by the Israel Defence Forces. That followed the Foreign Secretary himself posting on X that “a wholly independent review” was required. However, in response to my written question, the Deputy Foreign Secretary said that the Prime Minister had called for a “transparent investigation” into that terrible attack. A transparent investigation is not the same as an independent investigation. Given that the whole point of my question in the Chamber was to highlight that investigations conducted by the IDF into its actions are not independent, this answer troubled me. Given also that the Foreign Secretary refuses to come to this Chamber to be held accountable, can you advise me, Mr Deputy Speaker, how I can clarify whether the Minister did not accidentally mislead the House in saying that the Government wanted an independent investigation when they are only calling for a transparent investigation? All those who seek accountability for the actions of the IDF want to know what the Government’s position is.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Nigel Evans): ... Clearly the Chair is not responsible for the answers of Ministers, but those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the point of order and will make sure that the Minister is able to respond to her.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-29/debates/17FECF21-9273-404C-BE50-C6971930560E/PointsOfOrder>

The urgent question referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-17/debates/65D2C3D1-F094-4D2C-A6A2-267BAA710BE2/HumanitarianSituationInGaza>

David Rutley’s comments 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>

The Foreign Secretary’s X post referred to above can be read at

https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1776269496333860963

The written answer referred to above can be read at

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

Tommy Sheppard (SNP): ... In almost nine years in this House I have never before raised a point of order, but I am obliged to do so now because of my exasperation with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. On 6 February, I wrote to Lord Cameron, the Foreign Secretary, asking for information about the UK’s decision to withdraw funding from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. To date, almost three months later, I have had neither acknowledgement nor response. Given what is happening in Gaza, the urgent need for humanitarian aid and the role of UNRWA in that, I find that quite unacceptable.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you will know that there is widespread disquiet in this House about the fact that we cannot question the Foreign Secretary here in the Chamber. Now, not only is he not prepared to answer oral questions, but his Department is not answering written questions in a timeous manner. Can you please advise me of what action I and other Members might take to get a response from the Foreign Secretary and to hold that Department to account?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Roger Gale): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving

the Chair notice of his question. He will understand immediately that the Chair is not responsible for ministerial correspondence. I have noted what he has said, and of course it is the case that all Members should be entitled to receive timely replies. I trust that point will have been taken on board by those on the Government Front Bench.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-04-30/debates/8D261B65-7063-4389-846E-3DEB9B6240C2/PointsOfOrder#contribution-06540553-20AB-4AAA-BAC9-F6ED370AF610>

House of Commons Written Answers

Gaza: Aid Workers

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat) [23700] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has made an assessment of the potential merits of opening a coronial inquest into the killing of three British nationals working with the World Central Kitchen by an Israeli drone strike in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Prime Minister spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 2 April and made clear that the UK was appalled by the killing of seven World Central Kitchen aid workers, including three British Nationals, in an Israeli airstrike. The Prime Minister called for a thorough and transparent investigation into what happened. We are reviewing the initial findings of Israel's investigation of the incident.

Guaranteed deconfliction for aid convoys and other humanitarian work is essential. The Government mourns the loss of these brave humanitarian workers, and our thoughts remain with their families at this time.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-25/23700>

International Law: Israel

Richard Burgon (Labour) [23534] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether she has received reports from the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on Israel's compliance with International Humanitarian Law since January 29 2024.

Alan Mak: The Government periodically reviews advice on Israel's overall commitment to International Humanitarian Law, and Ministers act in accordance with that advice.

On 8 April 2024, following advice from the Foreign Secretary, the Business and Trade Secretary took the decision that our position on export licences would remain unchanged. This was consistent with the advice Ministers received. We are keeping all licences for Israel under careful review.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23534>

International Law: Israel

Richard Burgon (Labour) [23535] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, whether her Department has shared legal advice from the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs on Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law with representatives of her workforce within (a) the Public and Commercial Services Union and (b) other unions.

Alan Mak: FCDO advice informs decisions made by the Department for Business and Trade Secretary of State as the decision-making authority. The content of this advice is confidential. Union membership is a matter for individual staff members and does not alter the manner in which teams work in the Civil Service.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23535>

Middle East: Military Aid

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22754] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what criteria he uses to determine whether to hold a vote in Parliament on (a) military action and (b) the deployment of defence operations in the Middle East.

Leo Docherty: Publicising operational activity to Parliament in advance could undermine operational effectiveness and potentially risk the lives of Armed Forces personnel involved. The deployment of the Armed Forces is a prerogative power, and the Government is under no legal obligation to seek Parliamentary approval. However, the Prime Minister and Government Ministers consistently update Parliament through written and oral statements, also through Oral and Topical questions.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22754>

Israel: Military Aid

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23599] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the UK has a (a) treaty and (b) other agreement with Israel to defend it from external attacks.

Leo Docherty: The UK does not have a treaty or other agreement with Israel to defend it from external attacks.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23599>

Israel: Military Alliances

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23630] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what military agreements exist between the UK and Israel.

Leo Docherty: An agreement for UK-Israel military cooperation was signed in December 2020. It is not possible to release the agreement as it is held at a higher classification.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23630>

Israel: Armed Forces

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23600] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many armed forces personnel are stationed in Israel; and what their (a) locations and (b) responsibilities are.

Leo Docherty: The UK has a number of Armed Forces personnel across the Middle East, working closely with partners to carry out defence engagement and to uphold regional stability. I cannot go into specifics for operational security purposes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23600>

Israel: Armed Forces

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23628] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 9 February 2024 to Question 12736 on Israel: Armed Forces, what the ranks are of the Israeli military personnel in the UK; whether they are from the Israeli (a) army, (b) navy and (c) air force; and to which UK military bases they are posted.

Leo Docherty: This information is being withheld in order to protect personal information and to avoid prejudicing relations between the United Kingdom and another State.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23628>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-01/12736>

Israel: Military Exercises

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23629] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the Royal Air Force last conducted exercises with Israel's air force.

Leo Docherty: The Royal Air Force last conducted an exercise with Israel in

October 2021, in Exercise Blue Flag. This was a multi-national flying exercise designed to test aircrew skills to their limits.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23629>

Middle East: Conflict Prevention

Neil Hudson (Conservative) [23633] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent an escalation of conflict in the Middle East.

Nusrat Ghani: 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/2024-04-24/23633>

Iran: Israel

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22756] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the Israeli attack on Iran on 19 April 2024 on the wider regional (a) military and (b) humanitarian situation.

Nusrat Ghani: At the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting on 19 April, the Foreign Secretary and G7 partners called for all parties to prevent further escalation.

During his visit to the region last week, the Foreign Secretary reiterated to Prime Minister Netanyahu that we will continue to stand up for Israel's security, and the security of all our regional partners. He also made clear that we must maintain our focus on getting more aid into Gaza and getting hostages out.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22756>

Palestinians: Recognition of States

Andy Slaughter (Labour) [902584] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on the potential recognition of a Palestinian state.

Andrew Mitchell: As we have made clear, recognition of a Palestinian state can't come at the beginning of the process, but it doesn't have to come at the end. We reiterate our commitment to making progress towards a two-state solution, in which a safe and secure Israel lives alongside a sovereign, viable Palestinian state. We must start with fixing the immediate crisis in Gaza. We are intensely engaging with international, including European and regional, partners to this end.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/902584>

Israel: Palestinians

John McDonnell (Labour) [22664] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, with reference to the oral contribution of the Prime Minister in response to the the hon. Member for Liverpool Riverside during the Oral Statement of 15 April 2024 on Iran-Israel Update, Official Report, column 54, for what reason the United Kingdom abstained on the vote on admitting a Palestinian state as a full member of the United Nations on 18 April 2024.

Nusrat Ghani: As the Prime Minister made clear, the UK supports a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

We agree that the people of the West Bank and Gaza must be given the political perspective of a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future. And it needs to be irreversible.

We believe that recognition of Palestinian statehood should not come at the start of a new process, but it does not have to be at the very end of the process.

We must start with fixing the immediate crisis in Gaza. Gaza is Occupied Palestinian Territory and must be part of a future Palestinian state. However, Hamas is still in

control of parts of Gaza and Israeli hostages remain in captivity - this shows that we are still at the start of the process.

Ensuring Hamas is no longer in charge of Gaza and removing Hamas' capacity to launch attacks against Israel are essential and unavoidable steps on the road to lasting peace; as is working together to support the new Palestinian government as it takes much-needed steps on reform and resumes governance in Gaza as well as the West Bank.

We abstained on the vote at the UN Security Council because we must keep our focus on securing an immediate pause in order to get aid in and hostages out; then making progress towards a sustainable ceasefire without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22664>

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#contribution-BAC70839-E99D-4294-A233-6250BFE383B5>

Hamas: Hostage Taking

Jim Shannon (DUP) [22944] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on securing the release of hostages from Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The UK Government has been working with partners across the region to secure the release of hostages, including British nationals and their families.

We have been clear that the release of all the hostages is one of the vital elements for a lasting peace and the Foreign Secretary has reiterated that Hamas must send the hostages home and bring to an end the horrific ordeal of those currently being held.

The UK Government continues to call for an immediate humanitarian pause now to allow for the release of hostages.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-22/22944>

Gaza: Israel

Anum Qaisar (SNP) [22661] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the alleged use of artificial intelligence software in the conflict in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: Ministers and senior officials regularly raise with their Israeli counterparts a range of issues related to the conflict.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-18/22661>

Gaza: Drinking Water

Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op) [23500] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the potential merits of the resumption of the supply of fresh water in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The situation in Gaza is desperate. Too many Palestinian civilians have been killed and there is an urgent need to get more aid to the people of Gaza to prevent a famine. Israel has made some progress in allowing more aid into Gaza, but more needs to be done.

The Foreign Secretary visited Israel on 17 April. During his visit he met with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Affairs Minister Katz and reiterated the need to maintain focus on getting more aid into Gaza and getting hostages out. He also stressed the need to see an expansion of the types of aid allowed into Gaza and the provision of electricity, water and telecommunications, to both the north and the south of Gaza.

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22757] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what recent discussions he has had with his allied counterparts on how to tackle the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary discussed getting aid into Gaza with G7 counterparts on 19 April and at the World Economic Forum in Riyadh on 29 April. In addition, 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 and get hostages out, then progress towards a permanent, sustainable ceasefire.

The Government has reiterated these points in recent engagements with counterparts and partners. The Foreign Secretary also made these points during his 17 April visit to Israel, where he met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Israel Katz.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22757>

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

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22759] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has had discussions at the UN on the potential use of UN peacekeepers to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Nusrat Ghani: The deployment of UN peacekeepers would require a UN Security Council Resolution and the consent of all parties to the conflict. We judge neither of these requirements to be obtainable at this time.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22759>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Neil Hudson (Conservative) [23634] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps his Department is taking to help increase humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We have welcomed recent commitments from Israel to increase the amount of aid getting in to Gaza, including allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez crossing - steps we have long urged Israel to take. We want to see Israel fulfil these commitments swiftly and in full. The Foreign Secretary discussed this with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 17 April. During that visit, the Foreign Secretary urged Israel to deliver on its promises of delivering more aid into Gaza through as many routes as possible by land, sea and air.

The UK has announced a £9.7 million package of military and civilian support to set up a maritime aid corridor to Gaza, including the deployment of a Navy ship, and £3 million of additional funding for equipment to support UN and aid agencies at new and existing land crossings to get more aid into Gaza. The UK's contribution will include trucks, forklifts, generators, fuel stores and lighting towers.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-24/23634>

The announcements referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-boost-aid-support-for-gaza-by-sea>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-in-israel-to-press-for-de-escalation-of-middle-east-tensions>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Helen Grant (Conservative) [22542] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps he is taking to help increase the amount of aid getting into Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We trebled our aid commitment in the last financial year and are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air.

Israel has committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting into Gaza, including allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Port of Ashdod and the Erez crossing.

The UK has long urged Israel to take these steps and welcomes these commitments, and we have urged Israel to deliver on implementation. The Foreign Secretary discussed this with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 17 April. We are resolved that the international community will work with Israel to see these vital changes fully implemented.

We have announced £3 million of additional funding for equipment to support UN and aid agencies at new and existing land crossings to get more aid into Gaza. The UK's contribution will include trucks, forklifts, generators, fuel stores and lighting towers.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-18/22542>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-in-israel-to-press-for-de-escalation-of-middle-east-tensions>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22755] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what recent steps the armed forces have taken to deliver humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Leo Docherty: As part of a package of military and civilian support to set up a maritime aid corridor to Gaza, a Royal Navy ship has been deployed to join the life-saving mission in the Eastern Mediterranean. UK Armed Forces personnel have been deployed as planning teams with Allies and partners to support the wider delivery of humanitarian aid.

In March the RAF airdropped 28 tonnes of aid over Gaza, with a further 47 tonnes between 1-22 April, as part of the Jordanian led mission. With the exception of airdrops, the Ministry of Defence has not delivered humanitarian aid directly into Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22755>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22758] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what steps he is taking at the UN to increase the supply of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We are calling for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. The passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2728 on 25 March reflected international consensus behind this position.

We continue to use public and private diplomatic channels as well as the UN and other multilateral fora to underline the need to get more aid into Gaza. Ambassador Woodward made this clear in her statement to the UN Security Council on 18 April, when she urgently called for the full implementation of UN resolution 2720 to protect civilians and enable humanitarian assistance.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22758>

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

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [22761] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what discussions he has had on the provision of UK medical and surgical (a) services and (b) personnel in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: We are doing all we can to get more aid into Gaza by land, air and sea. A UK Med field hospital, funded by the UK, is up and running in Gaza. This facility is staffed by UK and local medics and is treating over 100 patients a day.

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

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-19/22761>

House of Commons International Development Committee

FCDO fails to answer on when UK funding to UNWRA will be restored

UNWRA is the main aid agency operating in the Gaza Strip and crucial to the delivery of aid there: before the current conflict, it acted in some ways more as a local authority, providing local services from education to refuse collection.

The World Health Organisation has confirmed in evidence to the Committee that, even as the second largest provider there, it could in no way compensate for gaps in health provision that would arise from de-funding UNWRA. But many countries, some of them among the biggest donors like the US and UK, paused funding for UNWRA after allegations that some of its staff may have been involved in the Hamas attacks of 7th October.

The FCDO committed to make a decision regarding future UK funding of UNWRA once the independent investigation launched into those allegations was concluded. That investigation has now reported, and other major donor Germany has announced its decision to resume funding.

But as correspondence between IDC Chair Sarah Champion and Foreign Secretary David Cameron published by the Committee today shows, the UK has still not announced if or when it will restore funding to enable UNWRA to continue its essential work and improve distribution of the aid that is badly needed to stave off the famine and disease taking hold in Gaza.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/98/international-development-committee/news/201197/fcdo-fails-to-answer-on-when-uk-funding-to-unwra-will-be-restored/>

Letter from Sarah Champion, Chair, International Development Committee to Foreign Secretary David Cameron

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44480/documents/221154/default/>

Letter from Foreign Secretary David Cameron to Sarah Champion, Chair, International Development Committee

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44499/documents/221214/default/>

House of Commons Library Briefing

UK aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: FAQs

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9900/>

Downing Street

PM call with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel: 30 April 2024

... They discussed the current hostage negotiations, and the Prime Minister expressed his solidarity with the hostage families and hope that the negotiations are concluded to allow hostages to return home as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister welcomed Israel's commitment to increasing the flows of aid into Gaza. He reiterated the urgency and importance of continuing to get much more aid in and emphasised there needed to be greater access to facilitate these deliveries, including via the vital land routes. The UK continued to push for an immediate humanitarian pause to allow more aid in and hostages out.

The Prime Minister reiterated the UK's support for Israel's security and said our focus is on de-escalation which is essential and in everyone's interest. Prime Minister Netanyahu thanked the UK for its recent support to further limit Iran's ability to destabilise the region.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-prime-minister-netanyahu-of-israel-30-april-2024>

Ministry of Defence

Royal Navy ship joins international effort to build pier for aid delivery into Gaza by sea

...Royal Navy support ship RFA Cardigan Bay is sailing from Cyprus to provide support to an international effort to build a temporary pier to allow delivery of humanitarian aid directly from the sea.

US ships and personnel have already begun construction of the temporary floating pier as part of ongoing work to significantly expand the delivery of lifesaving aid into Gaza.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary landing ship will provide accommodation for hundreds of US sailors and soldiers working to establish the pier. The pier will initially facilitate the delivery of 90 truckloads of international aid into Gaza and scale to up to 150 truckloads once fully operational, according to US estimates.

The multinational maritime corridor initiative will see tens of thousands of tonnes of aid pre-screened in Cyprus and delivered directly to Gaza via the temporary pier being constructed off the coast or via Ashdod Port, which Israel has said it will open.

Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said: It is critical we establish more routes for vital humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza and the UK continues to take a leading role in the delivery of support in coordination with the US and our international allies and partners. ...

This will complement the priority of getting more aid in via land routes and Ashdod port in Israel, by enabling tens of thousands of tonnes to be delivered directly from the sea onto the beach. ...

Supporting the Jordanian humanitarian land corridor from Amman into Gaza and in partnership with the World Food Programme, the UK's largest delivery of aid crossed the border on 13 March which saw more than 2,000 tonnes of food aid being distributed on the ground to families in need. Land deliveries will now be scaled up with the opening of the Erez crossing, which the UK wants to see reopened permanently.

The UK government is also doing everything possible to get more aid into Gaza by land and air. We trebled our humanitarian funding to the OPTs last financial year, delivering over £100 million of vital medical, shelter, nutrition and water/sanitation support. In recent weeks, the Royal Air Force has conducted nine airdrops along the coastline of Gaza ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/royal-navy-ship-joins-international-effort-to-build-pier-for-aid-delivery-into-gaza-by-sea>

Department for Business and Trade

Updated guidance: Trade with Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/summary-of-the-uk-israel-trade-and-partnership-agreement>

Scottish Government FoI Release

Information pertaining to landing of an Israeli air force plane

Please provide all internal and external correspondence sent and received by the Scottish government relating to the landing of an Israeli air force plane last November and the subsequent decision by Glasgow Prestwick not to accept any further landings from the Israeli air force.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202400405550/>

and

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/foi-eir-release/2024/04/foi-202400405550/documents/annex-a/annex-a/govscot%3Adocument/202400405550%2B-%2BAnnex.pdf>

and

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/foi-eir-release/2024/04/foi-202400405550/documents/information-for-release/information-for-release/govscot%3Adocument/202400405550%2B-%2BInformation%2Bfor%2Brelease.pdf>

Northern Ireland Assembly Members Statements

Situation in Gaza

Pat Sheehan (Sinn Féin): I would like to speak again this morning on events in Gaza.

It is difficult to believe that the genocide is continuing, but, unfortunately, it is.

We thought that the situation could not get any worse. However, then we heard last week that almost 400 bodies had been found buried around two hospitals, al-Shifa and Nasser. Among the bodies were children, women, old people, doctors and others who had been working in the hospitals or who had gone there for treatment.

In many cases, their hands had been tied behind their backs and the bodies showed evidence of torture as well. It is also believed that some of them had been buried alive.

It is difficult to imagine that there are people who would be prepared to inflict that type of cruelty and barbarity on other human beings.

Despite the ongoing genocide, there is a ray of hope with the protests that are taking place in universities right across the USA. They are reminiscent of the protests in the sixties against the Vietnam War.

The Israeli Government have made a massive miscalculation. They thought that they could slaughter thousands of Palestinians without being held to account for their actions.

However, public opinion is against them. People around the world are coming together to oppose the slaughter.

The international community, especially the US, Germany and Britain, need to bring pressure to bear on the Israelis to stop the killing.

There must be a ceasefire now.

If this conflict is to come to an end, there must be a meaningful peace process. There will be no resolution until there is an independent Palestinian state, free from colonial oppression.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024/04/29&docID=398864#4332602>

Israel-Palestine War: Situation in Gaza

Kate Nicholl (Alliance): The first Member's statement that ever I made was on the situation in Gaza and the call for an urgent ceasefire, the immediate end of Israel's siege in Gaza, the immediate release of the hostages by Hamas, a sustainable humanitarian corridor for aid to reach Gaza, the international community to do more and international community-led mediation to ensure a two-state solution. ...

I know that everyone in the House is sending our very best wishes to everyone in Palestine and Israel with a deep hope that peace can be found at last.

To read the full statement see

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024/04/29&docID=398864#4332645>

Freedom Flotilla: Aid to Gaza

Gerry Carroll (People Before Profit Alliance): I salute and acknowledge the important work done by the Freedom Flotilla, which is seeking to break the siege of Gaza and bring much-needed aid. It is an international aid flotilla with activists from across the world bravely taking part. Whilst Governments across the world send bombs to Israel to drop on the people of Gaza, those activists are bringing almost 6,000 tons of much-needed aid. As the Freedom Flotilla says: "When Governments fail, we sail". On that boat is Tyrone man, John Hurson, a long-time Palestine Solidarity Campaign activist. I wish him and all the flotilla the very best of luck and solidarity.

That important act of solidarity really exposes the situation starkly. On the one hand, you have Israel backed by the US, the highest military power in human history. Instead of all that technological skill and resource being used to help people, it is being used to commit a live-stream genocide. On the other hand, it is up to activists, volunteers and campaigners to expose Israel and call out its obscene actions.

Gaza is the end of the world that never ends. It is a daily nightmare for those who are trying to live there. Six months in, we daily see slaughter, massacre and hospitals and buildings being blown to smithereens. At least 35,000 people have been killed and 100,000 injured, not to mention the people still under the rubble. Palestine is the front line. It is the front line when it comes to facing the brutality of imperialism and settler colonialism; standing up to a brutal thug and bully who decides who lives, who dies and who lives where, with a brutal computer-assisted AI weapons system that slaughters on a mass scale; and resisting evictions from homes and towns. Solidarity with those on the flotilla and solidarity with the Palestinians.

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024/04/29&docID=398864#4332663>

STUC

Resignation of the First Minister

... STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer: ... "The First Minister can also hold his head high on his unwavering support for the people of Palestine. He has been a consistent voice of calm, measured reason, despite anguishing personal circumstances, in calling for peace and an immediate ceasefire in the area. ...

<https://www.stuc.org.uk/news/news/resignation-of-the-first-minister-/>

International Court of Justice

Alleged Breaches of Certain International Obligations in respect of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Nicaragua v. Germany): Request for the indication of provisional measures: The Court finds that the circumstances do not require the exercise of its power to indicate provisional measures

... Nicaragua requested the Court to indicate provisional measures, pending the Court's determination on the merits of the case, with respect to Germany's "participation in the ongoing plausible genocide and serious breaches of international humanitarian law and other peremptory norms of general international law occurring in the Gaza Strip".

In its Order, the Court: By fifteen votes to one, Finds that the circumstances, as they now present themselves to the Court, are not such as to require the exercise of its power under Article 41 of the Statute to indicate provisional measures. ...

The Court also recalls its [Order of 26 January 2024](#) and [Order of 28 March 2024](#), delivered in the case concerning Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), in which it affirmed that it remains deeply concerned about the situation in Gaza. The Court furthermore considers that it is "particularly important to remind all States of their international obligations relating to the transfer of arms to parties to an armed conflict, in order to avoid the risk that such arms might be used to violate the Genocide Convention and the 1949 Geneva Conventions on international humanitarian law", and that "all these obligations are incumbent upon Germany as a State party to the said Conventions in its supply of arms to Israel". ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/193/193-20240430-pre-01-00-en.pdf>

Order: Alleged breaches of certain international obligations in respect of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Nicaragua v. Germany)

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/193/193-20240430-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

United Nations

Secretary-General's press encounter

As Passover ends, I once again express my solidarity with the victims of the unconscionable Hamas terror attacks of 7 October, with the hostages, and with their families and friends.

Passover reminds us that the persecution of the Jews is as old as history itself. We all have a duty to speak out against all forms of antisemitism, in communities, in the media, and online.

Nearly seven months after 7 October, the situation for people in Gaza is worsening by the day.

I have called consistently for a humanitarian ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and a massive surge in humanitarian aid.

Unfortunately, that has not happened – yet.

But negotiations are once again underway.

For the sake of the people of Gaza, for the sake of the hostages and their families in Israel, and for the sake of the region and the wider world, I strongly encourage the government of Israel and the Hamas leadership to reach now an agreement.

Without that, I fear the war, with all its consequences both in Gaza and across the region, will worsen exponentially.

Recent weeks have seen airstrikes on the Rafah area.

A military assault on Rafah would be an unbearable escalation, killing thousands more

civilians and forcing hundreds of thousands to flee.

It would have a devastating impact on Palestinians in Gaza, with serious repercussions on the occupied West Bank, and across the wider region.

All members of the Security Council, and many other governments, have clearly expressed their opposition to such an operation. I appeal for all those with influence over Israel to do everything in their power to prevent it.

More than 1.2 million people are now seeking shelter in Rafah governorate, most of them fleeing the Israeli bombardment that has reportedly killed over 34,000 people. They have very little to eat, hardly any access to medical care, little shelter, and nowhere safe to go. In northern Gaza, the most vulnerable – from sick children to people with disabilities – are already dying of hunger and disease.

We must do everything possible to avert an entirely preventable, human-made famine.

We have seen incremental progress recently, but much more is urgently needed -- including the promised opening of two crossing points between Israel and northern Gaza, so that aid can be brought into Gaza from Ashdod port and Jordan.

Under international humanitarian law, civilians must be protected – and they must be able to receive the essentials they need to survive, including food, shelter, and health care.

A major obstacle to distributing aid across Gaza is the lack of security for humanitarians and the people we serve. Humanitarian convoys, facilities and personnel, and the people in need, must not be targets.

We welcome aid delivery by air and sea, but there is no alternative to the massive use of land routes.

I again call on the Israeli authorities to allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid and humanitarian workers, including UNRWA, throughout Gaza. ...

The health system in Gaza has been decimated by the war. Two-thirds of hospitals and health centres are out of action; many of those that remain are seriously damaged.

Some hospitals now resemble cemeteries.

I am deeply alarmed by reports that mass graves have been discovered in several locations in Gaza, including Al Shifa Medical Complex and Nasser Medical Complex.

In Nasser alone, over 390 bodies have reportedly been exhumed.

There are competing narratives around several of these mass graves, including serious allegations that some of those buried were unlawfully killed.

It is imperative that independent international investigators, with forensic expertise, are allowed immediate access to the sites of these mass graves, to establish the precise circumstances under which hundreds of Palestinians lost their lives and were buried, or reburied.

The families of the dead and missing have a right to know what happened. And the world has a right to accountability for any violations of international law that may have taken place.

Hospitals, health workers, patients and all civilians must be protected and the human rights of all must be respected. ...

I would like to conclude with a few words about UNRWA.

We recognize the irreplaceable and indispensable work of UNRWA to support millions of people in Gaza, the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Following the report by Ms. Catherine Colonna on mechanisms and procedures to ensure UNRWA's adherence to the humanitarian principle of neutrality, an action plan is being put in place to implement the recommendations of the report.

I appeal to donors, host countries and staff to cooperate with this effort. ...

UNRWA's presence across the region is a source of hope and stability. Its education, healthcare and other services provide a sense of normality, safety and stability to desperate communities. ...

This is the moment to reaffirm our hope for, and contributions to, a two-state solution - the only sustainable path to peace and security for Israelis, Palestinians, and the wider region. The United Nations is totally committed to supporting a pathway to peace, based on an end to the occupation and the establishment of a fully independent, democratic, viable, contiguous, and sovereign Palestinian State, with Gaza as an integral part. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2024-04-30/secretary-generals-press-encounter>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN experts demand safe passage for Freedom Flotilla's humanitarian mission to Gaza

UN experts ... demanded safe passage for the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, whose ships departing Türkiye will be carrying 5,500 tonnes of humanitarian aid and hundreds of international humanitarian observers to the besieged Gaza Strip. "As the Freedom Flotilla approaches Palestinian territorial waters off Gaza, Israel must adhere to international law, including recent orders from the International Court of Justice to ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian aid," the experts said.

They issued the following statement:

"Two hundred days into Israel's siege and genocidal violence, including an unprecedented starvation campaign against the Palestinian people in Gaza, the situation continues to deteriorate. After a 17-year blockade against Gaza, Israel has now created a famine by cutting off the regular supply of water, food and critical goods into Gaza, destroying livelihoods, the food system and civilian infrastructure. Failing to comply with its humanitarian obligations as the occupying power, Israel is also restricting humanitarian aid, intentionally bombarding humanitarian convoys, and targeting both aid workers and civilians seeking aid.

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition is a civilian peaceful initiative whose ships departing Türkiye will be carrying 5,500 tons of humanitarian aid and hundreds of international humanitarian observers to the besieged Gaza Strip. Comprising a diverse coalition of human rights activists, including lawyers, doctors, nurses, journalists, parliamentarians and politicians, the convoy aims to deliver life-saving aid directly to the besieged people of Gaza, legitimately challenging Israel's control over the entry of humanitarian assistance. Besieging a civilian population is unlawful.

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition's demands include an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire, unrestricted access to humanitarian aid, and an end to the illegal blockade of the Gaza strip. The convoy is scheduled for imminent departure.

The Flotilla is a material manifestation of international support for the ongoing Palestinian struggle for freedom and self-determination, and the internationally recognised right to receive humanitarian aid without interference or hindrance. Support for the Palestinian people's human rights is acute under the current conditions of genocide, domicile, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. We are witnessing purposefully induced famine amid the wholesale destruction of homes and hospitals. Disease is quickly spreading because millions of people were forced out of their homes, targeted, maimed or wounded, and left unable to be treated in highly unsanitary conditions, and are now living in makeshift and overcrowded shelters. The level of trauma and distress will impact Palestinians for generations.

Countries are not complying with their obligations to end Israel's genocide and starvation in Gaza. In fact, many countries continue supporting Israel with weapons, funds and political support: this may make them complicit in Israel's genocide and starvation. This is why civilians, like the Freedom Flotilla participants, are increasingly showing their solidarity

by protecting and fulfilling Palestinian human rights through direct action. They express the will of a global movement, especially sustained by youth worldwide, to bring the horrors in Gaza to an end – in the interest of both Palestinians and Israelis.

The Freedom Flotilla has the right of free passage in international waters and Israel must not interfere with its freedom of navigation, long recognised under international law. As the Freedom Flotilla approaches Palestinian territorial waters off Gaza, it is essential for Israel to adhere to international law, including recent orders from the International Court of Justice to ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian aid.

In 2010, Israel intercepted and attacked the Freedom Flotilla's civilian ships in international waters, killing 10 passengers and wounding many others. At the time, the Freedom Flotilla had attempted to break the Israeli blockade by delivering humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza.

We are especially concerned for the safety of the participants of the Freedom Flotilla in light of Israel's repeated targeted attacks against UN and civilian humanitarian missions. Israel should remember that the world is closely watching and refrain from any hostility against the participants of the flotilla."

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/04/un-experts-demand-safe-passage-freedom-flotillas-humanitarian-mission-gaza>

United States of America: UN Human Rights Chief troubled by law enforcement actions against protesters at universities

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk ... said he was troubled by a series of heavy-handed steps taken to disperse and dismantle protests across university campuses in the United States of America.

"Freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly are fundamental to society – particularly when there is sharp disagreement on major issues, as there are in relation to the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel," said Türk.

In recent weeks, thousands of US university students have been protesting against the war in Gaza. Large-scale demonstrations have also taken place on campuses in other countries in recent days. Many of the protests have been held without incident, and continue. At a number of locations, however, protests have been dispersed or dismantled by security forces. Hundreds of students have been arrested. Many have subsequently been released, while others still face charges or academic sanctions.

Actions taken by university authorities and law enforcement officials to restrict such expression need to be carefully scrutinised, to ensure such measures go no further than what is demonstrably necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of others, or for another legitimate aim such as maintenance of public health or order, Türk said.

"I am concerned that some of law enforcement actions across a series of universities appear disproportionate in their impacts," he added.

Türk emphasised that antisemitic conduct and speech, were totally unacceptable and deeply disturbing. Anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian conduct and speech were equally reprehensible, he said.

"Incitement to violence or hatred on grounds of identity or viewpoints – whether real or assumed - must be strongly repudiated," he said. "We have already seen such dangerous rhetoric can quickly lead to real violence."

"Such conduct can, and must be, addressed individually, rather than through sweeping measures that impute to all members of a protest the unacceptable viewpoints of a few. Here, as elsewhere, responses by universities and law enforcement need to be guided by human rights law, allowing vibrant debate and protecting safe spaces for all."

The High Commissioner stressed that any restrictions to freedom of expression and right to peaceful assembly must be strictly guided by the principles of legality, necessity and

proportionality. These standards must also be applied without discrimination, he added. “US universities have a strong, historic tradition of student activism, strident debate and freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,” Türk said. “It must be clear that legitimate exercises of the freedom of expression cannot be conflated with incitement to violence and hatred.”

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/04/united-states-america-un-human-rights-chief-troubled-law-enforcement-actions>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Nicaragua: Human Rights and Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon (DUP) [22954] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has made representations to his counterpart in Nicaragua on protecting (a) human rights and (b) religious freedoms (i) since the conviction of Bishop Rolando Álvarez and (ii) in the context of the treatment of Christians and Jews by President Daniel Ortega's regime.

David Rutley: We share widespread international concern about the suppression of human rights in Nicaragua. The UK has been increasingly vocal against the rising repression of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all, including Christian and Jews. Most recently, on 18 April, we released a statement marking the sixth anniversary of the brutally repressed protests in Nicaragua, highlighting continued UK concern at the ongoing situation. On 29 February, the UK also made a statement in response to the latest report by the UN Group of Human Rights Experts on Nicaragua, in which we urged President Ortega to respect fully the human rights of all its citizens. In my [Minister Rutley's] tweet on 16 January, I welcomed the release of Bishop Álvarez and 18 other clergy from their unjust detention but condemned their expulsion from Nicaragua and the continued detention of other political and religious figures.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-22/22954>

The statements referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-statement-on-nicaragua-19-april-2022>

and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/un-human-rights-council-55-uk-statement-on-nicaragua>

The report referred to above can be read at

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/A_HRC_55_27_AdvanceUneditedVersion1_0.pdf

The tweet referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/DavidRutley/status/1747290037669019888>

White Phosphorus

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [23806] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether it is his policy to oppose the use of phosphorous munitions.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: It is not UK policy to advocate for an international ban on the use of white phosphorous. White phosphorous is an obscurant with legitimate military uses, such as in smoke grenades, decoy and countermeasure equipment and signalling flares. However, as is the case with any military hardware, all parties to an armed conflict must ensure that their conduct and use of such materials complies with International Humanitarian Law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-25/23806>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Criminal Justice Bill

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

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

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

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

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>

TOP

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/>

**** Faith school designation reforms** (closing date 20 June 2024)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/faith-schools-policy-team/faith-school-designation-reforms/>

[TOP](#)

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