



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Food: Labelling

**Christopher Chope (Conservative)** [24608] To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for what reason the public consultation on fairer food labelling which closes on 7 May 2024 does not include labelling the method of slaughter used in respect of meat products.

**Mark Spencer:** The Government encourages the highest standards of animal welfare at slaughter, and legislation sets out the main requirements to protect the welfare of animals when being slaughtered. The Government expects the industry, whether food producer or food outlet, to provide consumers with all the information they need to make informed choices. Where any information is provided on the method of slaughter it must be accurate and not misleading to the consumer.

We are currently consulting on proposals to improve and extend current mandatory method of production labelling, including options for the production standards behind them. Our proposed standards initially focus on the period of time the animal spends on farm. We are seeking views through consultation on these standards, including the period of life which they should cover.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-02/24608>

Information about the (now closed) consultation referred to above can be read at

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/consultation-on-fairer-food-labelling/>

## House of Commons Library Briefings

### Devolution in Scotland: "The settled will"?

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8441/CBP-8441.pdf>

### Devolution in Wales: "A process, not an event"

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8318/CBP-8318.pdf>

## Scottish Government

### Hate crimes recorded by the police in Scotland, 2022-23

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/hate-crimes-recorded-by-the-police-in-scotland-2022-23/>

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## Israel

*See also the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee evidence session "The UK's international counter-terrorism policy" that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.*

## Westminster Hall Debate

### Palestinians: Visa Scheme

*col 1WH Cat Smith (Labour):* That this House has considered e-petition 648577 relating to a visa scheme for Palestinians. ...

Gaza Families Reunited is made up of 350 Palestinians living in the UK with family in Gaza. They are calling on the UK Government to establish a Gaza family scheme to enable Palestinians in the UK to bring their loved ones to safety from Gaza until it is safe to return. They note that the Government have previously introduced successful bespoke pathways for those fleeing persecution in Ukraine and Hong Kong, and argue that the same can and must be done for Palestinians from Gaza. ...

Since 7 October, which saw 1,143 people murdered by Hamas and around 3,500 injured, with 252 hostages taken, of whom 128 remain unaccounted for, we have all seen the devastating humanitarian consequences for all who are caught up in the conflict. It is impossible to understand the pain felt by those waiting to hear the fate of their loved ones taken hostage, or the grief of families mourning 34,000 killed in Gaza. We hear terrible statistics so frequently that they begin to lose their meaning. ...

I thank Noah Katz, who chairs Lancaster and Lakes Jewish Community in my constituency, for giving time and sharing how we can advocate for peace rather than stoking division, as well as our common views on the need to see hostages released and a ceasefire. Although the Jewish community in Lancaster is small, it has strong links with friends and family in Israel. In the seven months since 7 October, they have provided support for local Jewish families. The local Jewish community has adopted the Bibas family, as part of the "Seder Seat For a Hostage" campaign by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. I thank Noah for the way they support Jewish families in Lancaster, including my own.

*col 2WH Catherine West (Labour):* Would my hon. Friend agree that between the synagogues, mosques and churches in our constituencies we see an incredible extension of the concept of community and heart coming from our different faith communities, school groups and others? They promote togetherness and try to approach different problems

from a community point of view.

**Cat Smith:** I completely agree ... When we look at the philosophy of faith groups and, indeed, the philosophy behind every major world religion, it is one of peace and love. ...

**Afzal Khan (Labour):** ... The Foreign Secretary has called the scale and suffering in Gaza “unimaginable”, yet the Conservative Government are content with sitting on their hands, watching the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians left in Rafah suffer and wait to be killed without offering refuge. ...

**Cat Smith:** ... In my conversations with Gaza Families Reunited, I heard about one family in particular that had been displaced five times—each time a terrifying experience. Aid is still not reaching Gaza in sufficient quantities, and the humanitarian crisis is worsening daily. The UN World Food Programme says that due to food shortages, Gaza is entering “full-blown famine”. That will only be made worse by the beginning of the invasion in Rafah—the same place Israel encouraged Gazans to move to in order to be in relative safety. ...

**Margaret Greenwood (Labour):** ... There are reports that almost half of the agricultural land in Gaza has been destroyed, and this morning it was said that the health system across Gaza could collapse in a few hours. ...

*col 3WH* **Karen Buck (Labour):** ... I was proud to be able to intervene in support of Ukrainian refugees, who were accommodated by friends and family in this country. We have a large Afghan community, and many people were disappointed at not getting similar treatment. Once again, many people who have family and friends in the Palestinian community feel that there should be parity of treatment for people based on need, rather than on where the conflict originated.

**John Cryer (Labour):** ...when I wrote to the Minister asking if there was a possibility of family visas, he wrote back saying that “our approach must be considered in the round rather than on a crisis-by-crisis basis.” ... When there were crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine and Hong Kong, schemes ... were set up to deal with those individual crises. Why cannot that be applied now?

**Cat Smith:** ... I agree that we cannot take a crisis-by-crisis approach. There is a huge problem for many people fleeing conflict all over the world, and the lack of safe routes is something that came up in conversations I had in meetings before the debate with organisations such as the Refugee Council. ...

**David Linden (SNP):** ... Given that the Foreign Secretary is on the record well in the past of referring to Gaza as an “open-air prison”, and with things only projected to get worse in Rafah, is it not the case that many of us can only conclude that, from the view of the UK Government, a Palestinian life is worth less than one of someone of another nationality?

**Cat Smith:** I agree ...

*col 4WH* **Caroline Lucas (Green):** ... the current system is simply not working, because the requirement to enrol biometrics at a visa application centre is simply impossible to meet ... The one in Gaza is closed, and people cannot get to Ramallah or Jerusalem. In effect, people are caught in this sickening Orwellian Catch-22 where they cannot enrol their biometrics because they cannot leave Gaza, and they cannot leave Gaza because they cannot enrol their biometrics. ...

**Lyn Brown (Labour):** ... the Home Office says that it can offer deferral of biometrics in some family reunion cases, but sadly for many families who are waiting for those decisions, it becomes too late because they die in Gaza just waiting for the decision. ...

**Cat Smith:** ... The Government’s position, outlined in their response to the petition in December, is that the UK recognises that there are people impacted by the war who may wish to join family in the UK. However, the Government are not making plans to create a bespoke pathway for Palestinians, but continue to prioritise immediate family reunification for British citizens and for people with a pre-existing right to live in the UK for over six

months. The Government state that Palestinians can come to the UK through existing immigration routes, but the petitioners wished me to draw particular attention to the lack of safe routes out of Gaza for Palestinians ...

For their application even to be considered by the Home Office, people must attend visa application centres to give their biometric data, but there is no VAC in Gaza—it has closed—and they cannot get through to Jerusalem or Ramallah. Until recently, of course, people could pay thousands of US dollars to get out via a private company, over the Rafah border to Egypt, but that is now impossible due to the situation at the Rafah border. ...

People living in the UK who have families in Gaza that they have not managed to get out can do nothing but watch their families suffer daily. ...

For those who are able to get out of Gaza and into Egypt, their future is uncertain. Palestinians have no status in Egypt, so students, teachers, small business owners and so on are left in limbo, out of immediate danger but unable to start rebuilding their lives. It seems clear to me that events in recent years in Ukraine, Gaza, Afghanistan and beyond mean that, as a country, we need to look again at how we support and protect those fleeing conflict. ...

The immediate priority, however, must be Gaza, given the devastation of the conflict and the lack of support for Palestinians in surrounding countries. ... The petitioners are asking a very basic question: why should people living in the UK not be able to apply to sponsor their family members in order to keep them safe while the conflict is ongoing? If we were able to implement a visa scheme for the people of Ukraine, why can we not implement a similar one for the people living in Gaza? ...

Of course, there must be a right of return attached to any scheme. Sadly, the history of the region has all too often been one of dispossession and loss, and it is essential that any Palestinian leaving Gaza can return to rebuild their lives there as soon as they feel able to do so. ...

**col 6WH Apsana Begum (Labour):** ... “The plight of Palestine refugees remains the longest unresolved refugee crisis in the world,” according to the United Nations. This was the situation even before the current war on the civilians of Gaza. ... we are witnessing collective punishment, destruction and displacement of human lives on a horrific and unprecedented scale. Ongoing indiscriminate bombing has turned a chronic humanitarian crisis into a catastrophe. For those who survive, there is an imminent risk of death by disease and starvation. ...

How can it be that there are no safe routes for Palestinians to reach sanctuary in the UK, even if they have family here? In fact, humanitarian visa routes are rarely available to Palestinians in any form, despite one in six of the world’s refugees being Palestinian. ...

The dehumanisation and devaluation of Palestinian life has been stark and, to be totally frank, utterly appalling. History teaches us that a people are dehumanised so that they can be killed, displaced and starved with impunity, and indeed, so that they can be denied assistance and asylum when they are clearly in need. ...

**col 7WH** The political establishment has been totally out of touch with the majority of British people on this. ... how is it that the Government condemn certain countries for their human rights records and crimes, but not others? Why does the right to self-determination seem to be spoken about for some, but not others? Why are some national flags celebrated but others denigrated, or even effectively banned? Why are some deaths mourned and others explained away? Why is it that, for the Government, too many Palestinians have been killed or are starving, but there is no condemnation of those who killed them or are starving them? ...

What did they think would happen when they supported the openly declared intent to reduce the entire Gaza strip to rubble? Whenever this Government have been asked about the long-term plan for millions of civilians in Gaza, they have been unable to answer. Instead, it was this Government who withdrew funding from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency shortly after the International Court of Justice’s interim ruling. It is this

Government who help to ensure that Israel has the weapons to kill women and children. ...  
*col 8WH* **Mark Logan (Conservative):** ... on Friday past, 143 countries at the United Nations General Assembly voted to recognise Palestine as a state. ...

**Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat):** ... British people as a whole, whatever their ethnic background or heritage, see people in harm's way and want to help them. ...

*col 9WH* **Mark Logan:** ... Are Home Office civil servants considering alternatives—one identical to the one for Ukraine or others—that could help the people of Gaza? At the end of the day, the Gaza strip has roughly 1.8 million to 2 million people: about the same population as my home region of Northern Ireland. People have fled to Rafah, which pretty much maps on to the same area as Heathrow airport; it has been referred to as a city of children. Action needs to be taken. ...

Those in Gaza trying to get to the United Kingdom or other countries via Egypt face considerable cost. I hope that we are looking into that as a Government to find a way to alleviate the pressure on those applying. ...

Obviously, the scheme that we are debating today is a short-term fix. The people of Palestine—ultimately, the Gazans—want to be in their home, which is Gaza ...

**Jess Phillips (Labour):** ... there are tens of thousands of orphans in Gaza who have no immediate family and may very well be ill, but they may have aunties, uncles or cousins here in the UK. Any scheme that we design should ensure that it understands that most people's—certainly children's—immediate families in Gaza are all dead.

*col 10WH* **Kate Hollern (Labour):** ... Over 34,000 Palestinians have now been killed since 7 October. Sadly, that includes 14,500 children. Over 78,000 people are injured and more than 8,000 are missing, presumably dead under the rubble. ...

There are people at risk of serious harm, including from indiscriminate violence in armed conflict. Can they claim asylum in the UK? No, because they must be physically present to do so. The Government highlight the availability of safe and legal routes to get here, namely refugee resettlement programmes, refugee family reunion visas and nationality-specific humanitarian visa schemes. However, there seems to be a reluctance to recognise that these are very rarely available to Palestinians as they are currently ineligible for refugee resettlement in the UK, and a refugee family reunion visa depends on their having a sponsor already granted asylum. ...

Sponsored work or study visas are not designed for humanitarian purposes, and the associated costs and practical requirements are often prohibitive. Visitor visas are often refused by the Home Office, which is less likely to accept visitors who may claim asylum in the UK, despite the devastation that is happening in Palestine. In 2023, the Home Office refused around one in three visitor visa applications from Palestinians. ...

Existing visa options are simply insufficient in this case, and the Government know that.

*col 11WH* ... every day children are dying while we sit back and watch, and we need to act urgently. ...

There is no safe area in Gaza. A Rafah offensive must not go ahead, and the UK Government must do everything in their power to make sure that it does not happen. That includes immediately halting the sale of all weapons to Israel and helping with delivery of aid. Only today, on social media, I saw settlers totally destroying a delivery of aid, laughing and cheering as they did it. ...

Building on the precedent set by the Homes for Ukraine programme and other nationality-specific schemes that have been established previously, the UK Government now have an opportunity to extend compassion and solidarity towards the people of Palestine ...

**Joanna Cherry (SNP):** ... I am a supporter of the Balfour Project, which seeks to do three things: first, to acknowledge Britain's historic role in shaping 20th and 21st-century Palestine and Israel, particularly in the light of the Balfour declaration and the policies of the British mandate; secondly, to support Palestinians and Israelis in building a peaceful future based on equal rights, justice and security for all; and thirdly, to work for the British

Government's recognition of the state of Palestine.

*col 12WH* While the British Government recognised the state of Israel in 1950, Palestinians remain stateless, exiled, refugees or second-class citizens in their own land. ... The United Kingdom therefore bears a historic responsibility for what has happened to Palestinians since the Nakba, which should be at the forefront of the Government's and Ministers' minds when considering this request for a visa scheme for Palestinians. ...

I will talk about one constituent in particular; her name is Dr Eman El-Bahnassawy. She is a specialist dentist who managed to evacuate her 79-year-old mother from Gaza to Cairo at huge expense ... This old lady witnessed the Nakba as a child, and she has endured all the recent wars on Gaza. She is in very poor health and has already been displaced nine times during the current war. Her home has been destroyed by the bombing, so she has nowhere to go back to. Her daughter and her daughter's family ... are in a position to support their mother, but they face huge logistical difficulties in getting here. They look at the scheme afforded to Ukrainian refugees and cannot understand why, in all conscience, the British Government cannot replicate that scheme for people like them. ...

*col 13WH* In the absence of a specific family route for people to leave Gaza and join family members in the UK, they can seek to rely only on existing routes such as the family visa or the skilled worker dependant visa, which are extremely limited. ...

**Stephen Timms (Labour):** I agree with what the hon. and learned Lady is saying. Does she acknowledge the point ... that people taking one of the routes she has just suggested would need to apply for biometric deferral, and every single application since 7 October has been refused? Is she baffled by that, as I am ...

**Joanna Cherry:** Cynically, I am not particularly baffled by it, because I know that this Government have a strange attitude towards their international legal obligations in relation to refugees. ...

... the Rafah crossing is now closed and the situation is rapidly deteriorating, which makes this request all the more urgent, but even those who, like my constituent's mother, manage to get to Egypt are trapped in limbo once they are there; they cannot join their loved ones in the UK ...

*col 15WH Tulip Siddiq (Labour):* ... My mother came to this country as a political asylum seeker in the 1970s, because this country—our country, of which we are proud—has always been seen as a safe haven for people who are escaping conflict or places that are too dangerous to live in. We now need to show the same compassion to people who are fleeing unimaginable situations and trauma. ...

Nearly 75% of Gaza's total population has been displaced by this terrible conflict, and over 33,000 people have been killed. ... There must be a ceasefire, the immediate release of hostages and a serious political process towards a two-state solution. International law must be upheld, and it is has been deeply shocking to see reports that indicate that it may have been breached. ... Ministers have a duty to ensure that the UK Government themselves are fully compliant with international law when it comes to the clear licensing criteria that apply to arm sales to Israel, given the developments in this conflict.

*col 16WH* Finally ... we know that almost no aid is entering northern Gaza, and it is vital that aid is allowed in as quickly as possible. ...

**Claire Hanna (SDLP):** ... There is nowhere for Gazans to go, there is very little medical assistance and there is almost nothing to eat—and ahead of its latest brutalising assault, Israel has designated the desert strip of al-Mawasi as a "humanitarian zone", although it degrades that word in the same way that it degrades the hundreds of thousands of people who are trying to exist there. ...

... the current arrangements are not working and people are literally dying for want of a solution. Members have set out that, of course, Gazans cannot access biometrics. I wrote on behalf of a constituent of mine and was cheerfully pointed to the other centres working throughout the region. We wrote to the British embassy in Jerusalem, which did not reply,

and to other centres, and my constituent Ahmed has been advised by immigration lawyers that his application will cost thousands of pounds per person. Of course, there is also an extremely high rejection rate, and that excludes the approximately \$5,000 payable to a private company, Hala, which manages the border crossing from Gaza into Egypt. ...

*col 17WH* We can barely comprehend the toll on individual families. ...

Not everybody in Gaza is seeking to leave—of course they are not; they just want to live peacefully in their home place. Small numbers will leave and go elsewhere in the region, but some in Gaza have their closest relatives here, with the means to give them comfort and some sort of a future. Who of us in this room would not do exactly that for our parents or other close relatives if they were living in such circumstances?

The current impossible barriers—biometrics, visa fees, high rejection rates, and border crossing fees—effectively mean that we have no scheme. That is not just, it is not proportionate and it is not moral. ...

**Sam Tarry (Labour):** ... Israel, the only democracy in the middle east, has really now destroyed its moral integrity. Many of us who talk to people in both Palestine and Israel know that if there is not a just solution, recognition for what has gone on and consequences for those who have advocated—in the most extreme terms, in the case of the Israeli Government—for the utter and complete destruction of Gaza, and the human cost of that, with tens of thousands of children slaughtered, then it is the beginning of the end of the international rules-based order.

**Richard Burgon (Labour):** ... The forcible displacement of civilian populations is always immoral, and it is unlawful, but it is what Israel has been doing to the Palestinian people. ...

*col 18WH* **Sam Tarry:** ... our country, more than any other, has a historic duty because of the role that we played in the creation of the problem and the conflict 75 years ago. ... There is a moral as well as a humanitarian duty on all of us to do that ...

**Imran Hussain (Labour):** ... Does he agree that the blatant disregard and mockery of [the rules-based] order, which has happened right before our eyes over the last few weeks and months, should cause the international community to hang its head in shame? ...

**Sam Tarry:** ... we need to consider a scheme very similar to the one under which so many Ukrainians have been welcomed into our country. That scheme showed that the people of Britain have a great deal of compassion for their fellow humans, and that they understood and saw the savage butchery going on in Ukraine. In the same way, people in my community would welcome to their homes, even if just temporarily, Palestinians who need the shelter of our nation and our people.

**Andrew Western (Labour):** ... Canada has given approval in principle to those seeking visas under family reunion schemes and supported them to get to Egypt, so that all people eligible under the scheme can get there, rather than just those who have the money to do so. Does he agree that if that support were in place then all Palestinians, on an even basis, could get out to a place of safety here in the UK, admittedly on a temporary basis?

**Sam Tarry:** ... The Canadian scheme has a lot of merit ... it was just two years ago that the Government swiftly introduced the Ukraine family scheme, as part of that which British citizens and permanent residents were able to sponsor a wide range of family members—parents, siblings, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews—for visas. That sponsorship scheme was open to Ukrainians with no family ties to the UK, it was free of charge, and the visas last three years. ...

*col 19WH* Nobody should have to pay tens of thousands of pounds to get across the border at Rafah. We should be able to put in place arrangements in our immigration system so that people can provide their digital fingerprints and make applications in a way that is right for our country, but allows them to leave quickly and arrive at a safe haven on our shores as quickly as possible. On top of that, where they are able to, I believe that those people should be permitted to work immediately. ... The Gazan people are a highly skilled, incredibly intelligent and well-educated workforce, and many of them would love to make

their contribution in return for safety and refuge from the barbarity that they are facing.

**Anne McLaughlin (SNP):** ... In the UK Government's response to the petition, they said that there are "no plans to introduce bespoke arrangements for people arriving from the region" and that those "wishing to come to the UK who currently have no visa can apply under one of the existing visa routes." ...

*col 20WH* If I were to write down the safe and legal routes to the UK, I would not even fill half a sheet of A4 paper. I could do it in really big writing and I still would not fill half a sheet. I find the Government's response to the petition quite insulting. ... The description of people "arriving from the region" does not begin to do justice to the true horror of the situation for the millions of people in Gaza who are desperate to escape to some kind of safety. ...

... no words are adequate to describe the horror of what is happening in Gaza, and it just gets worse and worse. Israeli forces have closed the only way out, meaning there is no way out for people and no way in for essential aid. They have invaded the only supposed safe space in the entire region, after explicitly directing millions of people to go there.

This morning, we have been told that what remains of the healthcare system in Gaza is about to collapse due a lack of fuel and aid. ...

*col 21WH* Most of my Gazan residents and constituents who got out did so during the initial phase of the war, with British family members. They were allowed to bring their families with them, as they were in Israel, where the British Government laid on flights for British Israelis to be evacuated. ... will the hon. Member seek from the Minister an answer on what the costs were for our Gazan Palestinian constituents compared with the scheme for those in the exact same conflict?

**Anne McLaughlin:** I absolutely will ask the Minister to answer that question. ...

The petition is a call for a temporary solution—just to help keep people alive. These people do not want to live here. They want to live in a free, rebuilt Palestine. They deserve the right to do that, and we need to help them to do so.

The Minister has been shaking his head every time someone suggests that he and his Government seem not to care. ...

He's shaking his head at me again. Some things are a political difference of opinion, right?

This is a point blank refusal to offer protection to human beings at risk of death. There is no other way to describe it. He should be fighting for these people; he should be using his power and influence as a British Government Minister to save their lives. He can shake his head all he likes, but if he continues to refuse, he and we will all know the truth. ...

*col 22WH* **Andy Slaughter (Labour):** ... Ukrainian open house is organised every month by two of my constituents ... It provides a raft of services and advice to Ukrainian refugees in the UK. West London Welcome ... caters to a wide range of asylum seekers, particularly those living in appalling conditions in hotels. It supports them in every possible way, from providing food to counselling. For reasons we all know about, they are not entertaining Palestinian refugees at the moment, but clearly the same rights should be extended as have been extended to other groups who have sought refuge in this country. ...

I raised the issue with the deputy Foreign Secretary a few weeks ago ... the deputy Foreign Secretary ... said: "The Government's answer is that the two positions are not analogous; they are very, very different. The hon. Member will know that we are doing everything we can to help individual cases in both instances, and we will continue to do so."—[\[Official Report, 19 March 2024; Vol. 747, c. 817.\]](#)

If the two situations are not analogous, I would like to hear an exposition from the Minister on why that is the case. ...

*col 23WH* ... this is a quote from the Government's response to the petition today: "There are currently no plans to introduce bespoke arrangements for people arriving from the region who do not hold permission to come to the UK. That means that immediate family members of British citizens, and those settled in the UK, who wish to come and live in the



UK and do not have a current UK visa can apply under one of the existing family visa routes. Individuals who meet these criteria should apply for a visa to enable them to enter the UK in the normal way.”

Then it helpfully tells people that the visa application centres in “Egypt, Jordan and Turkey are open and offering a full service.”

Well, they are probably not too busy because there are not many people from Gaza turning up there.

The last point I want to make on these false premises is about the idea that the scheme would be a way for Gazans and Palestinians to come to the UK and live here permanently. That has never been alleged against Ukrainians. We know the passion with which Ukrainians want to return as soon as they can to their homeland. The same is true to a greater extent for Palestinians, as is clear to anyone who, like me, has visited the region; ... Above all, they want the right to live in their own country, recognised internationally and governed by the rule of law. The Palestinians have been campaigning for the right to return to their country for nearly 80 years, and it is frankly insulting to say that they are looking at a way to permanently settle elsewhere. There is a Palestinian diaspora around the world; there is a Palestinian diaspora in refugee camps throughout the middle east. Most Palestinians want to live in a free and democratic Palestinian state. ...

**col 24WH George Galloway (Workers Party of Britain):** ... I am going to leave aside the fact that this is all entirely hypothetical at this point, because Israel has seized the Rafah crossing in absolute breach of the Camp David accords, which have the power of international law, having been adopted by the Security Council. The Philadelphi corridor is completely sealed, and this is the fourth day in a row on which exactly no food or medical aid—none—has entered Gaza. Therefore, even if the British Government move their show to the border, no Palestinian would be able to get biometric tests anyway. ...

... it was in this very building that the entire Palestinian tragedy was authored, when on behalf of one people our Government promised to a second people the land that belonged to a third people. You would think that that was a matter of historical guilt for our Government that they might want to mitigate in some way, leaving aside the fact that hundreds of our soldiers, police officers, civil servants and staff of this very House were murdered in the King David hotel. Our soldiers were left hanging by piano wire in the orange groves of Jaffa, booby-trapped. Should the Government not have a scintilla of guilt and responsibility for what has happened to the Palestinian people in the past and in the last seven months?

**col 25WH** It is not true that our military aid to Israel is minuscule. If we define it by completed pieces of ordnance, it may be, but our components are in most of Israel's bombs and rockets that are falling down on the poor people in Gaza, who are defenceless prisoners in what the then Prime Minister, now Foreign Secretary David Cameron described as the largest open-air prison in the world. He went on to say that it must not be allowed to remain so, and that was in 2010. Now that he is the Foreign Secretary in 2024, he turns his face away from the people in that prison camp that he said must not be allowed to remain so.

It is not just ordnance: we have flown 200 missions from our sovereign base in Akrotiri in Cyprus. Who knew that we had a sovereign base in independent Cyprus, a European Union and allied country? We have the right to fly whatever we like out of that sovereign base, and 200 times we have flown spying missions over Gaza for the edification of Netanyahu and his gang in power in Tel Aviv.

Our contribution to this massacre is very significant, both historically and contemporaneously. What are people from all sides asking here, some of them actually capital-F friends of Israel? They are all asking for one small thing: that you at least allow people who are citizens here and contributing here to get their old mother out of Gaza, rather than see her, perhaps on their telephone, being torn to shreds by a bomb that would not have been as effective if it were not for the components being given from British

factories and targets being assisted by RAF jets flying out of Akrotiri. ...

**Stuart C McDonald (SNP):** ... In the face of this humanitarian catastrophe, is it really the Home Office's response to do nothing and change nothing? ...

The existing rules are simply not working and are not sufficient. Whether a person can join family members here depends first on the category of leave or visa that the family member has—whether that is as a refugee or with humanitarian protection, whether it is as a UK citizen or with settled status, or whether it is with some form of temporary leave such as for study or work. Given the hellish circumstances in Gaza, the right to be joined by family fleeing catastrophe should not depend on the type of leave that a person has. We must be much more generous about the category of family members who can apply to join so that it is not just immediate family members, but parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, and so on. We in this room would all want—indeed, we would all demand—precisely the same if it was our relatives in the same situation.

Similarly, the fees and charges that generally apply to many applications, often amounting to several thousands of pounds when the immigration health surcharge is included, should be waived. In the face of such untold horrors, we cannot make family unity dependent on a person's wealth. ...

*col 26WH* Even for those fortunate enough to qualify for family reunion or another visa that enables them to get here, the applications take far too long, with many being left in destitution and in limbo, usually in Egypt, where resident rights are often quick to expire, along with any access to education for kids or to healthcare or housing. ...

Even while the crossing was open ... many Palestinians, even if they were, or could have been, able to join family here in the United Kingdom ... were left to be subject to essentially extortion by an Egyptian company called Hala and forced to pay \$5,000 per adult or \$2,500 per child in cash to cross, and only first-degree relatives of people physically present in Egypt could even do that. ...

**Tommy Sheppard (SNP):** ... the level of evidence required and the costs involved mean that [the schemes] are simply not appropriate or effective. ...

*col 27WH* **Imran Hussain:** ... The rules are so outrageous that even a person who was unfamiliar with them would see instantly that they are not going to work, because people simply cannot get to the place they need to reach to they get the required documents. ...

**Stuart C McDonald:** ... the system is not designed for the circumstances that are unfolding ...

However, rather than making things easier, the Minister seems to have made the position tougher through new guidance about when exceptions to biometric enrolment would apply. That is why not a single application to defer biometrics has been granted by the Home Office since Israel began its offensive in Gaza ... In the circumstances, that is utterly incomprehensible. ...

We are just asking for a reasonable approach as to when biometric information needs to be provided; we are not asking for it to be waived altogether. We understand the importance of the checks, but the Minister cannot be oblivious to the horrible problems that his Department's approach is causing people who want to leave Gaza. ...

*col 28WH* **Olivia Blake (Labour):** ... That thousands of people have signed the petition that triggered this debate should be a sign to everyone here that there is significant support and compassion for those who are fleeing the violence and destruction of war, and for welcoming refugees into our communities. We saw the same with Ukraine, with people opening their homes and the reunification of families meaning so much to people. ...

With Ukraine, the Government rightly responded by waiving all fees, salary thresholds and language tests under the Ukraine family scheme. That programme opened applications to all civilians in need, and it significantly reduced the visa paperwork. Those who could not reach a visa application centre were swiftly issued with permission-to-travel letters on the basis that applicants could finish the process in the UK. The Government also extended

the use of the “UK Immigration: ID Check” app to Ukrainian nationals, which allowed applicants to enrol digitally with their biometrics using a mobile phone. Those measures demonstrate what can be done when the public support for those trapped in conflict meets the political will that something can be done in Westminster ...

However, despite the mass support for the family scheme for Palestinians, we have seen no action from Ministers on Gaza. In fact, not only have the Government refused to implement a similar scheme, they will not even waive the fees or relax the biometric requirements for making a standard immigration application. ... What is the difference between a Palestinian fleeing the bombs overhead in Gaza and a Ukrainian doing the same in Kyiv? ...

*col 29WH* People in Gaza with family members in the UK remain trapped, with no safe or viable routes to reunite with their families. Without a specific family route, they can rely only on existing routes, such as family visas or skilled worker dependent visas, but to make those applications is nearly impossible. The closest and most viable visa application centre is in Egypt, on the other side of the Rafah crossing, which we have heard is currently under assault and for some days now has been completely closed. ...

It would also be wrong of me not to stress that, rather than ad-hoc schemes for individual crises and countries, a solution would be to lift the Government’s in-practice ban on asylum applications. We need more safe routes and more safe passage to the UK for people facing war and conflict, the majority of whom are children, have injuries or have family here. ...

**Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour):** ... As the Israel Defence Forces ramp up operations in Rafah, there are no remaining safe zones left in Gaza. Nearly 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, over 75,000 have been injured, and more than 1.5 million have been displaced. ...

People who have already been forced out of their homes are having to flee once again. According to an interim damage assessment conducted by the World Bank and the UN, \$18.5 billion-worth of damage to critical infrastructure has been done, and 74% of that is housing. Eighty-four percent of health facilities in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, and those that are left are barely functioning. Doctors are having to perform amputations on children and perform C-sections without anaesthetic. It is worth restating that under the Geneva conventions, the forcible transfer of a civilian population is a war crime, as is the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure. Yet, even after the ICJ ruling, our Government’s decision to keep supplying military hardware to Israel and their failure to push for a lasting ceasefire mean that the UK is wholly complicit in creating the conditions for the humanitarian crisis we are now witnessing. We have a responsibility to help those who are suffering. ...

*col 30WH* Unfortunately, the Government’s response to the plight of Palestinian refugees has been typical of their punitive approach to people seeking safety. ...

Besides the current conflict, Gaza has been under blockade for years. People from Gaza do not casually leave and travel to different parts of the country. ... Those seeking to leave Gaza are trapped in a Catch-22 because of this situation. They cannot enrol their biometrics because they cannot leave Gaza, and they cannot leave Gaza because they cannot enrol their biometrics. ...

... when millions were displaced by Russia’s appalling invasion of Ukraine in 2021, the Government had the Homes for Ukraine scheme live in a matter of weeks. It is right that that happened, and I believe the Government have not done enough for Ukrainian refugees, but when the conflict began in Gaza and thousands of Palestinians were displaced, and then more than a million, where was the homes for Palestine scheme? ...

*col 31WH* In comparison, between 15 March 2022 and 7 December 2023 Ukrainian nationals could apply online without the need to enrol their biometrics until after they reached safety in the UK. Again, this was absolutely the right thing to do, but why are Palestinians being denied the same conditions and compassion? ...

There is nothing that Palestinians want more than a safe return to their home. However, the inordinate civilian death toll in this conflict sadly means that many Palestinians simply will not be alive to exercise that right. From the Sykes-Picot agreement to the Balfour declaration, the betrayals of McMahon to the invasion of Allenby's forces, we have to acknowledge that it was long-standing British policy to displace Palestinians from their homes.

Our shared colonial history means that we have a unique responsibility towards Palestinian refugees and a particular responsibility to push for peace in the region, but it is a responsibility that this Government have completely shirked so far. ...

**Peter Grant (SNP):** ... the Government have become so obsessed with the view that any immigration is a bad thing that has to be stopped if at all possible, and so obsessed with the way they calculate net immigration. They have worked out that if we allow a small handful of desperate Gazan citizens to come here, that will increase net inward migration, and that is a bad thing. Is that where we have come to? ...

*col 32WH* ... the fact that these people are not able to get out of Gaza is something that this Government have the power to change on their own. We do not need the permission of anyone else, we do not need intense diplomatic efforts and we do not need the threat of sanctions or embargos or anything like that. All we need to do is to say to people: "It's difficult to get your families out of Gaza, but you get them out of Gaza and we will get them here." It is not international law, or treaties, or anything else that is preventing the Government from saying that. They are not saying it because they have decided that their political priority is not to bring these people to these islands. ...

*col 33WH* Right now, thanks to this country's great ally Israel, Gaza is not fit to sustain human life on any scale and it is certainly not fit to sustain human life on the scale of the numbers who are trapped in Gaza just now.

Why cannot the Government, in among all their rhetoric, just own up to the fact that there is no safe legal route out of Gaza? There is none. There is absolutely no safe legal route for people to get out of Gaza. The Government do not want to admit that—why not? ...

*col 34WH Yasmin Qureshi (Labour):* ... The whole world has heard the comments of the various leaders of the Israeli Government, such as saying that the Palestinians or Gazans are the Amalekites, or the fact that leaders, defence Ministers and generals are saying, "They are not human beings; they should be in the Sinai desert." They heard the Minister who looked at the complete devastation of Gaza and said, "This is such a beautiful site. We are looking forward to building our homes there."

We have seen the relentless bombing—bombing and bombing and bombing. We are seeing children with their limbs blown off, and women and other adults damaged. We have heard of people's skin peeling off. We have seen real crimes being committed in front of our eyes, yet all we have are platitudes from world leaders. They say, "Well, Israel is going to abide by international law," or, "The IDF is the most moral army in the world." I do not know whether it is a moral army or not; all I am saying to people is that people should see what is actually happening in Gaza and draw their own conclusions.

We now have a situation where water, food, clothes, medicine and generators are available and we can help the people in Gaza, who are now stuck in a tiny space—1.5 million of them are displaced. However, it is not a natural famine or disaster; it is purely and simply because the Israeli Government will not let aid in, with the illegal Israeli settlers playing their part to stop aid getting in. What are our moral international Governments doing about that? ...

It is only a small number of people who are able to leave Gaza and join their families in the United Kingdom; why is that not happening? We see the destruction, and as many colleagues have said, those people are not going to be a burden on the taxpayer or the state, because their family and friends will look after and pay for them. I know that those people will go back to their homeland. One of the reasons why so many Palestinians are stuck where they are in Rafah is that they know that if they left Palestine the chances of

them being able to return are virtually negligible.

We saw what happened in the 1940s with the Nakba, where 700,000 people were expelled forcibly and not any have been able to come back. Now their families and children are languishing in tents in Lebanon, Jordan and the rest of the surrounding countries. There are now approaching 4 million or 5 million of those displaced people. For 75 years, everybody in the international community has talked about how the Palestinians would be able to come back, or about a homeland for the Palestinians.

*col 35WH* Nothing has happened. ...

I say to the Government, this will not cost money. ... the scheme already exists. It is literally copy and paste to apply it to the circumstances in Gaza and to make the rules easy as well, so that people can get out. ...

In Ukraine, many children were severely injured and had amputations, and about 150 of them were accepted in British hospitals by the British Government, who paid for them to have limb reconstruction and other surgeries, or chemotherapy to treat cancer patients, yet not a single Palestinian child has been accepted. Not a single Palestinian child has been offered that service, despite the fact that in hospitals, such as Great Ormond Street Hospital management, are happy to take the children. ... What is the difference between a Palestinian child and a Ukrainian child?

**John Hayes (Labour):** ... Some months ago, when the initial proposal came up, many were conflicted about whether it should be supported. They were conflicted in the Palestinian community as well, because people did not want to be seen to be complicit with what was ... a second Nakba.

*col 36WH* At that stage, many Palestinians remained within Gaza, because they thought that it would be a limited action. They thought—all of us thought, naively—that the world would not stand by and watch this take place on that scale; a Nakba. I do not think that anyone calculated the level of killings that were to take place, and no one had any understanding of the scale of the deaths among children in particular. ...

Some Palestinians have gained access to security, some in hotels in our constituencies, but they have not gone through the route allowed by the Government; they have come on the boats across the channel. Here is the irony: they are now part of the categories that will be targeted for Rwanda. There is an inhumanity about the way the Palestinians have been treated—not just by the Israelis, but by the Government as well. ...

Some months ago I raised the question of the evacuation of injured children with the Deputy Foreign Secretary. Voluntary organisations here and in Europe were willing to work together to secure access to health facilities for the most injured—not just in Egypt, but in Europe and Britain. We were assured that a group was being formed, co-ordinated by the FCDO, to enable the evacuation to happen. My understanding is that that has not happened on any scale yet, and today we discovered that the health service in Rafah has virtually collapsed because of the lack of fuel. ...

*col 37WH* **Alison Thewliss (SNP):** ... More than 3,000 people have written to me on the ongoing situation in Gaza to call for a ceasefire, the return of hostages, for aid to get in and for a lasting peace and a two-state solution. The Government have not done anything practical to respond to the concerns raised by our constituents. ...

*col 38WH* More than 35,000 are dead and 80,000 are injured. The Gaza Families Reunited campaign has brought a very reasonable request before the Minister, and I commend it for all the work that it has done on this. I will say something about the practicalities of what it proposes. Hon. Members across this Chamber have said that existing routes do not cut it and are not working. Family reunion visas, visitor visas and student visas are not working at all. ...

**Nadia Whittome (Labour):** ... the Home Office allows applications for family visas only for immediate relatives, defined as partners, children or parents of children under 18. That excludes other close relatives such as siblings or parents of adult children, for example.

As a result, perhaps the only surviving relatives of people with families in the UK might be stuck in Gaza with no way of joining them. Does she agree that it is beyond time that the UK Government introduced a Palestinian family scheme ... and that in fact they have a historical colonial responsibility to do so?

**Alison Thewliss:** I entirely agree ...

A recognised Palestinian refugee won a recent court case on this issue, challenging the Home Office's refusal to decide the family entrance clearance applications of his wife and children under refugee family reunion rules on account of their inability to enrol their biometrics in Gaza. That was described as being "irrational and unreasonable" by the courts, and it is entirely irrational and unreasonable. ... it is in the hands of this Government and this Minister to make the decision to waive the requirement for biometrics. He could do it at the stroke of a pen this afternoon if he so wished, and I would like him to explain why he will not. ...

*col 39WH* The people in Gaza are having to bribe their way across the border and are being smuggled out. This Government are supposed to be against people smuggling, but people have no choice. It costs \$5,000 per adult and \$2,500 per child, if anybody can even scrape that money together. People are crowdfunding on the internet to pay themselves across the border. ...

Turning back to the court case, disclosures were made that every single entry clearance visa application from Gaza made from 7 October has been refused by the Home Office. If this is about safe and legal routes, why are they automatically being refused? We know from experience that even visitor visas—a third of those last year—were refused because the Government do not believe that people are going to go back to Gaza, and in the circumstances, why would they? ...

The House of Commons Library briefing for this debate spoke about the rarity of that. Palestinians accounted for 0.14% of the people on boats, or 53 out of 36,704. They may well be sent to Rwanda after fleeing a war zone, getting across continents, getting in a small boat and getting to safety here. Can the Minister say whether anybody who came in such a way will be removed to Rwanda? Will he at least rule that out for some kindness to the Gazans who have managed to make it to our shores to safety? ...

*col 40WH* **Stephen Kinnock (Labour):** ... The terrorist atrocities conducted by Hamas on 7 October 2023 killed over 1,100 innocent civilians. They included cases of rape and sexual violence, and the kidnapping of 250 people, the majority of whom have still not been released. It is almost impossible to comprehend the fear and anguish felt within those families who have been torn apart, and the unimaginable pain of the relatives of the hostages.

As has been stated so clearly today, the Israeli Government's response and the subsequent war in Gaza has ended the lives of tens of thousands of innocent people, many of them women and children. It continues to cause untold misery and heartache to hundreds of thousands more who have lost loved ones or had to flee for their lives, and now over 1 million people in Gaza face famine.

We should never forget that at the heart of this conflict are human beings who simply seek to live their lives free of violence, fear and intimidation, who want nothing more than to protect their families and loved ones, and build a successful future for them and their children. The urgent imperative is therefore to bring an end to this war, and we urge the Government to use every ounce of their diplomatic leverage to create the conditions needed for an immediate ceasefire observed by both sides, with the immediate release of hostages and immediate, unimpeded aid to Gaza.

We have also been absolutely clear that the forced displacement of the Palestinian people is unacceptable. The priority following an immediate ceasefire must be for Gazans to be able to return to their homes and their land, to begin to rebuild all that they have lost during this devastating war, and to ensure that their displacement does not become permanent.

This will be made exponentially harder by an Israeli offensive in Rafah, which risks catastrophic consequences ...

The Rafah crossing is, of course, essential for moving humanitarian assistance into Gaza, and therefore the safety of those operating aid deliveries and of those receiving the aid must not be compromised.

*col 41WH* In tandem with that essential diplomatic work, and as the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza continues to worsen, the UK must consider the impact on British residents and citizens who have family in Gaza and are desperately seeking to ensure their safety. ...

For instance, we know of one father who is here in the UK, desperately trying to reunite with his wife and three young children who are currently trapped in Gaza and sheltering in a house with more than 200 other people. His twin babies are suffering with health issues, and his wife fears that she will run out of milk to feed them. We have heard of the plight of an unaccompanied 14-year-old boy who is alone in Gaza, having lost both his parents and been separated from wider family, who seeks to join his brothers in the UK, who are British citizens. ...

At the moment, these families and others like them have been unable to leave Gaza. Even where they should qualify for family reunion under UK immigration rules, they are facing insurmountable barriers. For example, we have heard reports of long delays in getting decisions or visas issued, and families are also being told that they will not be given their visas—even though they are eligible—until they have submitted biometrics data. However, there is no infrastructure left in Gaza at all, and it is completely impossible to get biometric data submitted from within Gaza itself. Although biometrics could be submitted from Egypt, the vast majority of these individuals and families are not able to travel to Egypt without some kind of visa or assistance from the UK. As a result, they are trapped.

This is a desperate and deeply distressing scenario, and I therefore urge the Minister to look rapidly at the following issues. Will the Home Office now defer the biometrics requirements for those who are eligible for family reunion, but cannot physically get out of Gaza, until they can get to a visa application centre in Egypt or another country? Similar arrangements were rightly made for Ukrainians, and could be replicated for Gaza now, as other countries such as Canada are already doing. Will the Government now urgently operate a scheme whereby individuals in Gaza can have their family reunion visas assessed either online or by telephone, as is the case with the Canadian Government, and approved in principle before being assisted to leave Gaza, with biometrics data then being submitted in Egypt prior to travel to the UK?

Secondly, will the FCDO work urgently to ensure that all those who hold UK visas or are eligible for family reunion, but must leave Gaza in order to submit biometrics, are assisted to leave? What co-operation has there been with Egypt on that issue, and how will it be managed if the Rafah crossing closes altogether? ... What more could be done to help British Palestinians get their relatives to safety? British Palestinians have made it clear that their families who come here will want to return home to Gaza as soon as it is safe to do so, so right of return must be built into the process. ...

*col 42WH* The UK Government must continue to push for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all hostages, and immediate and unimpeded aid to Gaza, and to work towards a two-state solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. ...

**The Minister for Legal Migration and the Border (Tom Pursglove):** ... The barbaric attack perpetrated on 7 October by Hamas was an affront to humanity. At the same time as we condemn Hamas, lament the loss of life they inflicted and demand the release of the hostages, we are also united in our horror at the civilian casualties and the scale of the suffering in Gaza. Israel has a right—indeed, a responsibility—to defend itself against the threat from terrorists. As we have made clear repeatedly, it is important that it does so in accordance with international humanitarian law. ...

Hon. Members will be aware that the Government have mounted, and continue to mount, a large-scale effort to facilitate the flow of aid that is so desperately needed. As the Deputy Foreign Secretary said in the House less than a week ago, “We want to see an end to the fighting as soon as possible... the fastest way to end the conflict is to secure a deal that gets the hostages out and allows for a pause in the fighting in Gaza. We must then turn that pause into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

Regarding the situation in Rafah, our position has been consistent. We are deeply concerned about the prospect of a military incursion, given the number of civilians who are sheltering there and the importance of that entry point for aid. Entry points for humanitarian aid, including Kerem Shalom, must be reopened quickly to allow aid in. Israel must facilitate immediate, uninterrupted humanitarian access in the south, especially the entry of fuel, and ensure the protection of civilians and safe passage for those who wish to leave Rafah. As yet, we have not seen a credible plan to protect civilians...

In parallel, we continue to push as hard as we can to get much-needed aid into Gaza via vital land routes, alongside sea and air, to alleviate the suffering. Israel has now committed to significant steps to increase the amount of aid getting into Gaza.”—[\[Official Report, 7 May 2024; Vol. 749, c. 443.\]](#) ...

**col 43WH Catherine West:** ... given the estimates from charities that there are 17,000 orphans, we are dealing with an extreme situation, and ...there should therefore be a special scheme in this regard, especially given our historic link with the region and with this particular conflict ...

**Tom Pursglove:** One of the points that I was particularly struck by in various remarks during the course of the debate was the issue of admitting children to UK hospitals to access treatment and support. Presently we have not received any specific applications, but we understand that NGOs—such as the International Committee of the Red Cross—are able to support those requiring urgent medical treatment out of Gaza. Likewise, Children Not Numbers supports children in Gaza to secure evacuation and delivers aid to families. If applications come forward, they will be treated with the utmost seriousness ...

**col 44WH** I would argue that the principal, most important thing is to have a durable ceasefire that brings an end to the hostilities, and one that is durable in the long term. That is the best outcome for everybody in the region, but the House will recognise why that is impossible with Hamas in charge in Gaza. ...

It is the case that we are assisting British nationals and other eligible people to leave Gaza, liaising closely with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities. However, we do not control the Rafah border crossing, and it is the Israeli and Egyptian authorities that make the final decisions on who can exit Gaza. We are aware of the unique circumstances affecting those who would like to exit Gaza, and the unusual role of foreign Governments in seeking permission to leave on behalf of individuals. The FCDO has, therefore, been able to facilitate the departure from Gaza to Egypt of Palestinians who have both strong links to the UK, by having either a spouse or children under 18 currently living in the UK, and currently hold valid permission to enter or remain for longer than six months. ...

**Nadia Whittome:** ...The fact is there is no safe and legal route for Palestinians to come to the UK. Not only does he refuse to set up a Palestinian family scheme ... but, because of his Government’s Rwanda law, any Palestinians who come here by small boat, because they have no other means of getting here, will be criminalised and deported. ...

**col 45WH Tom Pursglove:** It is a fact that all those individuals leaving French shores in small boats are leaving what are fundamentally safe countries. There is no justifiable reason for anybody to be making that perilous crossing and putting their life at risk in the way that we have seen. ...

Decisions as to who can leave Gaza and enter Egypt remain with the Israeli and Egyptian authorities. We will obviously keep the position under review, as I have said. There are a couple of challenges that we have to be mindful of: first, the practical challenges that are



apparent in getting people out; and secondly, the need to maintain biometric checks to protect people here in the United Kingdom.

I think that the House will recognise that the security relationship with, for example, the Ukrainian authorities is very different from the one we have with the authorities in Gaza, who are a terrorist organisation. ...

I will say a little more about those challenges because they are materially important. First, on enrolling biometrics, setting up a route would not address the wider challenges facing people unable to exit Gaza to complete the application process by submitting biometrics. Any change to the biometric requirements would cause critical identity and security checks to not be completed, which could expose the UK public to heightened levels of harm. Regardless of that, it would not address the fact that it is the Israeli and Egyptian Governments who make decisions on who can exit Gaza and enter Egypt.

There is a strong basis for why biometric checks are vital. As I say, they are critical to identity assurance and suitability checks on foreign nationals subject to immigration control. Checks are made against immigration and criminality records. We have a duty to uphold national security as a Government and to guard against public safety risks. ...

**Stuart C McDonald:** ... nobody is arguing that there should not be biometric checks, but they can be done in an intermediate country, such as Egypt. The Canadians operate like that, and the Canadians are also much more successful in getting people out of the country because they are on a specific list. Why cannot the UK Government just do what the Canadians are doing?

*col 46WH* **Tom Pursglove:** There would have to be agreement around that. The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of deferral in his speech. What I can say on that is that we have agreed to predetermine a small number of cases in line with published guidance. We will predetermine an application where a person confirms that they are able to travel to a visa application centre, they can satisfy us about their identity and there are compelling reasons for doing so in the way I have described.

There was also reference to fee waiver applications during the course of the debate. People need to apply for a visa by filling in the form and contacting UK Visas and Immigration; then the compassionate element to predetermine or waive fees will be considered.

The point about wider relatives was mentioned in a number of contributions. Under the adult dependent relative rules, an applicant must show that, as a result of age, illness or disability, they require long-term personal care to perform everyday tasks and that this can solely be provided in the UK by their relative here. If this is not met, however, a decision maker will consider whether there are compelling, compassionate and exceptional circumstances to grant leave outside the rules.

On visa application centres, although UKVI has a visa application centre in Gaza, I recognise that it has been closed since 7 October due to the conflict. Therefore, those who exit Gaza into Egypt can access UK visa application centres in either Cairo or Alexandria. Both locations have good appointment availability, with Cairo having 43% of capacity remaining for the week commencing 12 May and 76% in the week commencing 19 May and Alexandria having 74% and 93% respectively. ...

*col 47WH* **John McDonnell (Labour):** ... In January, I tabled an early-day motion asking the Government to meet and support the organisation, Save Gaza's Children. I was assured by the Deputy Foreign Secretary at the time, on the Floor of the House, that that organisation would be linked to the FCDO's group that was working to facilitate the evacuation of children on medical grounds. This Minister has said today that there have been no applications whatever, so clearly the system established by the Foreign Office is not working. ...

**Tom Pursglove:** I will want to go and pick up that point with colleagues in the Foreign Office and understand the specifics around it, but I will refer the right hon. Gentleman to

the point that I made at the outset of my remarks, in relation to those very vulnerable children. ...

*col 48WH* A number of points were raised about the wider safe and legal routes landscape. I am very proud that as a country we have provided over half a million people with sanctuary in the UK since 2015. ...

Ultimately, we need a long-term solution to this crisis. That means the release of all hostages, Hamas's rule dismantled, their ability to attack Israel removed, a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza and a political horizon towards a two-state solution. Israelis and Palestinians should be able to live together, side by side, in peace and security. That is our ultimate goal, and we will continue working tirelessly to achieve it.

*col 49WH* **Cat Smith:** When members of the public go on the website to start a petition, it can be quite an intimidating experience, because the thresholds are so high, at 10,000 to get a Government response and 100,000 to secure a debate in Parliament. These petitioners have met that relatively easily. That shows the strength of feeling within all our constituencies about the situation.

To be very direct to the Minister, I think the petitioners will be incredibly disappointed with his response. They were asking how it can be that Palestinians have no safe routes to the UK when they have family here. The Minister has said a lot of words, but frankly I think members of the public watching will be thinking that they made very little sense. In particular, his comments about good availability of appointments in Cairo will have left people shouting at the TV screens they are watching this on. People cannot get to Cairo from Gaza. They are trapped. ...

*col 50WH* It has been really comforting to witness cross-party consensus and how we all spoke with one voice in support of this scheme. I think it is incredibly disappointing that the Government Minister did not follow the mood in the room. The comments about orphaned children in particular will stay with me for a very, very long time. Those children have absolutely nobody in this world. They might have a distant relative—an aunt or an uncle—here in the UK, but they do not qualify for any UK visa scheme. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-13/debates/C04330B1-6243-4B7B-9AFA-66AFCE259FC5/PalestiniansVisaScheme>

*e-petition 648577: Create a Palestinian Family Visa Scheme for Palestinian people affected by war, together with the Government response to the petition can be read at*  
<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/648577>

*The International Court of Justice interim ruling (Order) referred to above by Apsana Begum and Bell Ribeiro-Addy can be read at*  
<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

*Information about the General Assembly vote referred to above by Mark Logan can be read at*  
<https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12599.doc.htm>

*The judgement referred to above by Alison Thewliss and Stephen Kinnock can be read at*  
<https://tribunalsdecisions.service.gov.uk/utiac/jr-2024-lon-000082-jr-2024-lon-000128>

*The House of Commons Library Briefing referred to above by Alison Thewliss can be read at*  
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2024-0095/CDP-2024-0095.pdf>

*The guidance referred to above by Tom Pursglove can be read at*  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biometric-information/unable-to-travel-to-a-visa-application-centre-to-enrol-biometrics-overseas-applications-accessible>

*The Early Day Motion referred to above by John McDonnell can be read at*  
<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61735/shortterm-medical-evacuation-of-children-from-gaza>

The Deputy Foreign Secretary's comments referred to above by John McDonnell can be read at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-08/debates/AFB7B263-C4D4-4B7E-B7B3-EED39C534A63/IsraelAndPalestine#contribution-85D94AD2-2A19-44DB-B47D-1BA694F6AAEF>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Arms Trade: Israel

**Martyn Day (SNP)** [24681] To ask the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, if she will make an assessment of the potential implications for her policies on arms exports to Israel of protests by university students.

**Alan Mak:** The UK has one of the most robust and transparent export licensing systems in the world, enshrined in law through the Export Control Act and implemented through our Strategic Export Licensing Criteria.

This informs our approach to export licensing – both for our extant licences and for new licence applications for exports to Israel. All decisions are assessed on a case-by-case basis against our licensing criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-02/24681>

The Act referred to above can be read at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/28/contents>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

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

### Israel: Air Force

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [25078] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Royal Air Force operated planes have flown to Israel since 24 April 2024.

**Leo Docherty:** As of 8 May 2024, two Royal Air Force operated planes have flown to Israel since 24 April 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/25078>

### Israel: Air Force

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [25079] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will publish details of the items that Royal Air Force operated planes landing in Israel since 7 October 2023 have carried on board.

**Leo Docherty:** Royal Air Force operated planes landing in Israel since 7 October 2023 have been used by Ministers, officials and UK Armed Forces personnel conducting diplomatic and defence engagement, and to transport life-saving medical supplies.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/25079>

### Israel: Air Force

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [25080] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many personnel from his Department have been transported to Israel on RAF operated planes since 7 October 2023.

**Leo Docherty:** Ministers, officials and UK Armed Forces personnel have travelled to Israel using RAF aircraft. This information is not held centrally within the Ministry of Defence, we are unable to give a specific number.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/25080>

### Israel: Air Force

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [25361] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many

planes operated by the Royal Air Force have landed in (a) Lebanon, (b) Egypt, (c) Jordan and (d) Syria since 7 October 2023.

**Leo Docherty:** The RAF undertakes regular flights to the Middle East region as part of our routine engagement and to conduct humanitarian aid airdrops as part of the Jordanian led mission. For operational security considerations we will not comment further.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/25361>

#### **Israel: Air Force**

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [25362]** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many planes operated by the Royal Air Force have taken off from Israel since 7 October 2023.

**Leo Docherty:** There have been 59 Royal Air Force aircraft that have taken off from Israel from 7 October 2023 to 9 May 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/25362>

#### **Gaza: Military Aid**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour) [24529]** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when the last delivery of aid by the Royal Air Force to Gaza took place; and how frequently aid will be delivered in the coming months.

**Leo Docherty:** As of 2 May 2024, the most recent air drop by the RAF took place on 30 April. This brought the total of UK airdrops conducted as part of the Jordanian led mission to ten, delivering over 98 tonnes of vital humanitarian aid to Gaza. The FCDO are the HMG lead for humanitarian aid and its delivery.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24529>

#### **Gaza: Military Aid**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour) [24530]** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how the Royal Fleet Auxiliary will support the delivery of aid to Gaza.

**Leo Docherty:** RFA Cardigan Bay has been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean to provide support to an international effort to build a temporary pier to allow delivery of humanitarian aid directly from the sea into Gaza. This support will involve the provision of accommodation for hundreds of US sailors and soldiers working to establish the pier.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24530>

#### **Gaza: RFA Cardigan Bay**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour) [24531]** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how long RFA Cardigan Bay will be deployed to Gaza; and what role the armed forces will play in the construction of the temporary pier.

**Leo Docherty:** RFA Cardigan Bay has been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean, however, we will not comment on the duration of the deployment. RFA Cardigan Bay does not have a direct role in construction but will provide support to the US personnel working to establish the pier.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24531>

#### **Gaza: Military Aid**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour) [24532]** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he expects the temporary pier in Gaza to be operational; and whether UK troops will have a role in protecting it.

In the continued effort to increase the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza a temporary pier is being **Leo Docherty:** constructed off the coast to enable delivery as quickly and securely as possible; the US Department of Defense aim to have the pier operational in May 2024. That work is ongoing with the US, Cyprus and other

partners. RFA Cardigan Bay has been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean to provide support to the US personnel working to establish the pier. As of 2 May, UK personnel will not be undertaking roles protecting the pier.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24532>

### **Gaza: Ceasefires**

**Matthew Pennycook (Labour)** [24978] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what recent steps his Department has taken to help ensure all parties comply with resolution 2728 (2024) adopted by the UN Security Council on 25 March 2024.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The passing of UN Security Council Resolution 2728 reflected international consensus behind the UK's position that we need an immediate pause in the fighting to get aid into Gaza, to secure the release of hostages and make progress towards a permanent, sustainable ceasefire. The Prime Minister made this point during his call with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 30 April. The Foreign Secretary raised this with counterparts and partners during his visit to Israel and the OPTs in April.

We continue to use public and private diplomatic channels as well as multilateral fora to underline this.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/24978>

*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))

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

### **Gaza: Israel**

**Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru)** [24979] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, if he will make an assessment of the implications for his policies of the planned march into Gaza by Israeli settlers on 15 May 2024.

**Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru)** [24980] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterparts on the planned march in Gaza by Israeli settlers on 15 May 2024; and if he will take diplomatic steps to help prevent the resettlement of Israeli settlers in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The UK policy on settlement expansion is clear: settlements are illegal under international law and only make it harder to progress to achieving peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. We have called on the Israeli Government to halt seizures of Palestinian lands immediately.

On 3 May, the Foreign Secretary announced new sanctions on extremist groups and individuals for inciting and perpetrating settler violence in the West Bank. The measures impose financial restrictions on the entities and individuals, and travel restrictions on the individuals. The UK will not hesitate to take further action if needed, including through further sanctions.

The Foreign Secretary has made our position clear to his Israeli counterparts, most recently during his visit to the region on 17 April.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/24979>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/24980>

*The announcement referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-extremist-groups-and-individuals-for-settler-violence-in-the-west-bank>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

### **Gaza: Israel**

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op)** [24083] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether

he supports the Israeli government exercising military operations in Rafah.

**Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [24084]** To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the criteria under which they would cease preparations for a military operation in Rafah.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We are clear that we would not support a major operation in Rafah unless there is a very clear plan for how to protect people and save lives. We have not seen that plan so, in these circumstances, we would not support a major operation in Rafah.

The fastest way to end the conflict is to secure a deal which gets the hostages out and allows for a pause in the fighting in Gaza. We must then work with our international partners to turn that pause into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-29/24083>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-29/24084>

### **UNRWA: Finance**

**Jim Shannon (DUP) [24472]** To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, if he will make an assessment of the potential impact of the decision to suspend funding to UNRWA on religious minorities.

**Andrew Mitchell:** Allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the events that took place on 7 October in Israel are appalling, which is why we took decisive action to pause future funding to the organisation.

The Prime Minister has been clear that the UK will set out its position on future funding to UNRWA following careful consideration of Catherine Colonna's final report, UNRWA's response and the ongoing UN Office for Internal Oversight Services investigation into these allegations.

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, working with multiple implementing partners.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24472>

*Catherine Colonna's report, referred to above, can be read at*

[https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2024/04/unrwa\\_independent\\_review\\_on\\_neutrality.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2024/04/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf)

*UNRWA's response referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-preliminary-response-final-report-independent-review-mechanisms-and>

### **Gaza: Food Supply**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour) [24527]** To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of access to food in Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** We continue to have grave concerns around humanitarian access in Gaza. Palestinians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis and there is an urgent need to get more aid to the people of Gaza to prevent a famine.

We have seen an encouraging increase in the number of aid trucks getting into Gaza and some World Food Programme aid has now moved from Ashdod Port into Gaza, but more needs to be done. We must see further action to ensure more aid actually gets over the border. We need progress on the UN's minimal operating requirements, including more visas and driver approvals granted, as well as more trucks permitted to cross into Gaza.

Aid will also not make a difference unless it can be properly and safely distributed. Guaranteed deconfliction for aid convoys and aid workers, and for other humanitarian work is essential.

The UK is playing a leadership role in alleviating that suffering. We trebled our aid commitment in the last financial year, and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible by land, sea and air.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24527>

### **Gaza: Humanitarian Aid**

**Stephen Morgan (Labour) [24528]** To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what diplomatic representations he has made to Israel on allowing 500 aid trucks a day to enter Gaza.

**Andrew Mitchell:** The Government maintains a regular and intensive dialogue with Israeli counterparts on issues relating to all aspects of the conflict, including Israel's commitments to increase aid into Gaza. The Prime Minister last spoke with Prime Minister Netanyahu on the 30 April, whilst the Foreign Secretary travelled to the region 17 April, where he met with President Herzog, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Katz.

The Government has been clear that, whilst we have seen an increase in the number of aid trucks getting into Gaza, more needs to be done. We need to see progress on the UN's minimal operating requirements, including more visas and driver approvals granted, as well as more trucks permitted to cross into Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24528>

### **Gaza: Armed Conflict**

**Gregory Campbell (DUP) [25175]** To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, if he will have discussions with the UN on establishing responsibility for the (a) bombing of the al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza in October 2023 and (b) recent deaths of four Israel Defence Forces soldiers at Kerem Shalom border crossing.

**Andrew Mitchell:** As the Prime Minister said on 23 October, the Government's judgement is that the explosion at Al-Ahli Hospital on 17 October was likely caused by a missile, or part of one, that was launched from within Gaza towards Israel. Hamas has claimed responsibility for the strike on 05 May which killed four Israel Defence Force soldiers at Kerem Shalom.

Our priority is doing all we can to reach a long-term solution to this crisis. This means the removal of Hamas' capacity to launch attacks against Israel, Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza, the release of all hostages, a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, and a political horizon to a two-state solution.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/25175>

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

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-10-23/debates/018D96AB-5D91-48D7-9809-19A03E54125A/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-61483896-20C4-4BA0-AC5E-163033573EB4>

## **UK Parliament Early Day Motions**

**Wera Hobhouse (Liberal Democrat) [744] 19th Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day ceremony** – That this House joins in commemorating the 19th annual Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day ceremony, held on Yom HaZikaron—Memorial Day—in Israel, beginning on the evening of 12 May 2024; pays tribute to all Israelis and Palestinians who grieve together and stand united in their demand for an end to bloodshed between both peoples; recognises that the lives of everyone connected to Israel and Palestine will never be the same as a result of the devastating events of 7 October 2023 in Israel and what has followed afterwards in Gaza; supports the work of Combatants for Peace and the Parents Circle-Families Forum in bringing Israelis and Palestinians together; believes that their mission of transforming despair into hope and building compassion around ideals of

shared humanity, justice and equality provides a pathway to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; further supports all grassroots efforts to build a shared future and a political solution that brings freedom, justice and safety for all; agrees that occupation, oppression, and conflict are not inevitable; and calls on the Government to fully support, through all relevant financial and political means, all such joint Israeli-Palestinian initiatives that promote peace, justice and a shared future for Israelis and Palestinians.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62244>

**George Galloway (Workers Party of Britain) [746] Arms sales to Israel** – That this House notes clearly established international law which prohibits intentionally or recklessly attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure; further notes that British arms sold to Israel are potentially being used to commit such serious violations of international law; condemns the killing of tens of thousands of people by Israel, and the forced displacement, starvation and deprivation upon more than 2 million people; therefore calls for an immediate suspension of arms licences and arms exports to the government of Israel; and further calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62247>

**George Galloway (Workers Party of Britain) [748] Day for Mourning and Solidarity with Gaza** – That this House notes the global Day for Mourning and Solidarity with Gaza held on 14 May 2024 organised by Experts House; expresses its solidarity with those standing up against the ongoing genocide in Gaza; and condemns the suffering endured by the people of Gaza, and the unprecedented growing death toll among civilians, including women and children, as well as humanitarian workers, healthcare and medical staff, journalists and media workers.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62251>

**Mick Whitley (Labour) [749] Scrutiny of the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and arms exports to Israel** – That this House expresses its deep concerns regarding the Israeli offensive on Rafah, which it believes will seriously worsen what is already one of the world's worst man-made humanitarian crises; reiterates its calls for an immediate and lasting ceasefire; further expresses its frustration at the Government's continued refusal to suspend arms exports to Israel; echoes the warnings issued by Lady Hale and over six hundred distinguished members of the legal profession in their correspondence to the Prime Minister of 3 April 2024 that the provision of military assistance and material to Israel may render the UK complicit in genocide as well as in serious breaches of International Humanitarian Law; notes that, as a result of his not having a seat in the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs has been unable to participate in departmental questions in the House and that Members have been restricted in their ability to scrutinise his work and that of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, particularly in relation to arms licences to Israel; believes that the moral imperative of ending arms exports to Israel is now so great as to warrant the House taking exceptional measures; and therefore calls on the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to work with the Speaker to make necessary preparations for the Secretary of State to answer questions on this and other matters from hon. Members from the Bar of the House of Commons as soon as possible.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62252>

*The correspondence referred to above can be read at*

<https://lawyersletter.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Gaza-letter-FIN-3-April.pdf>



## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

**David Cameron** Attacks by extremists on aid convoys en route to Gaza are appalling. Gazans are at risk of famine and in desperate need of supplies. Israel must hold attackers to account and do more to allow aid in – I will be raising my concerns with the Israeli government.

[https://twitter.com/David\\_Cameron/status/1790365756028227617](https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1790365756028227617)

## Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

### **Middle East: halt further escalation, says PACE rapporteur**

"Securing the release of hostages and preventing any further catastrophic escalation of the conflict are the two priorities demanding the full commitment of all parties at this critical juncture," said Piero Fassino (Italy, SOC), PACE rapporteur on recent developments in the Middle East, in a statement today.

He underscored that "since the appalling massacre perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023, both Israelis and Palestinians have endured immense suffering. Any exacerbation of the current situation will only compound human anguish and lead to irreparable destruction."

"With almost eight months of conflict behind us," Fassino stressed, "there is an urgent need for a collective surge of responsibility to ensure the effective implementation of a ceasefire, the safe return of hostages to their families, and unhindered access to essential humanitarian aid for the Palestinian civilian population, in line with Assembly [Resolution 2524 \(2024\)](#)."

"Action must be taken immediately," he concluded. "We cannot afford further delay, and no constructive initiative should be obstructed in achieving those objectives. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe stands ready to support any measures facilitating their realisation."

<https://pace.coe.int/en/news/9461/middle-east-halt-further-escalation-says-pace-rapporteur>

## United Nations

### **Secretary-General Deeply Saddened by Death of United Nations Personnel in Gaza**

... The Secretary-General was deeply saddened to learn of the death of a United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS) staff member and injury to another DSS staffer when their UN vehicle was struck as they travelled to the European Hospital in Rafah this morning.

The Secretary-General condemns all attacks on UN personnel and calls for a full investigation. He sends his condolences to the family of the fallen staff member.

With the conflict in Gaza continuing to take a heavy toll — not only on civilians, but also on humanitarian workers — the Secretary-General reiterates his urgent appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and for the release of all hostages.

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22223.doc.htm>

## UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

### **International Solidarity Student Activism for Peace**

... The catastrophe of increased war and violent conflicts around the world has galvanized youth to engage in international solidarity actions in universities around the world. The

core foundation of these movements is frustration with the non-responsiveness of states, academic universities, and non-state actors (including corporations) to uphold peace and human rights as core universal values by which to guide their policies and actions. ...

The UN Charter, Article 1, calls for “prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.” Youth are dismayed that the ICJ provisional measures issued (*South Africa v. Israel*), UN General Assembly Resolution ES-10/22, and UN Security Council Resolution 2728 have had little impact on the humanitarian situation in Palestine. Their actions may be interpreted as an attempt to stand up for the universal norms of peace and human rights as actually requiring practical implementation.

Some have indicated concern that the International Solidarity actions have created an unsafe space for Jewish students. This requires dissemination of human rights to solidarity activists to clarify the scope of peaceful assembly. International Solidarity for Peace movements should abide by human rights standards regarding the right to peaceful assembly. According to the UN Human Rights Committee, peaceful assembly is to be interpreted in relation to an aim of peace and non-discrimination: “In accordance with article 20 of the Covenant, peaceful assemblies may not be used for propaganda for war (art. 20 (1)), or for advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (art. 20 (2)). The UN has a Rabat Plan of Action on the ban of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that recommends a distinction be made between criminally punishable hate speech, hate speech that calls for civil or administrative sanctions, and hate speech that just raises concerns in terms of tolerance, civility and respect for the rights of others.

International Solidarity for peace activists should be allowed to uphold their right to freedom of expression without the threat of arrest, detention, and suspension. The deliberate mischaracterization of their calls on States to end human rights abuses, including violence against women and children, armed conflict, occupation, apartheid, food insecurity, forced migration, environmental degradation and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law (including genocide), among others, should not prevent young people from sharing their political demands and garnering public support for change. Moreover, mechanisms for students to engage in exercises of mutual respect and dialogue should be encouraged. ...

**To read the full statement see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/solidarity/statements/20240509-Statement-Bailliet-International-Soldiarity-Peace.pdf>

*The UN Charter, referred to above, can be read at*  
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

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

*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))

*The Covenant, referred to above, can be read at*  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

*The Rabat Plan of Action, referred to above, can be read at*  
[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Rabat\\_draft\\_outcome.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Rabat_draft_outcome.pdf)

TOP

### House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee

#### **The UK's international counter-terrorism policy**

**Q130 Sir Alex Younger (former Chief, Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)):** ... At the moment, we are benefiting from a lot of the action that took place to disrupt Daesh from 2016. While the threat environment is currently deteriorating again, it is still significantly lower than it was at what I regard, at least until now, to have been the high point, which was around 2016. ...

Over time, what I saw was the advent of highly organised transnational terrorism, which crashed on to all of our stages in 2001 but had been cooking for some time before. The early part of the threat for us was about the external threat generated by terrorist organisations overseas. During my career, it developed in two important ways. First, it became evident that that domestic threat was significantly modified and sometimes intensified by domestic conditions. It was about the interplay between the external threat and internal aspects of the same thing. That has continued to the point that it is now in a much more disaggregated and localised form. ...

The other is the way in which technology has altered all of this—made it more pervasive, reduced boundaries and enriched all our lives, but also increased the way in which we can be threatened. Relative to what we began with, it is quite a centralised, directed threat from, essentially, a failed space to now being much more disaggregated and technologically enabled. In terms of intensity, it is not as bad as it has been in recent times, but is currently probably beginning to get worse again. ...

**Q131 Chair (Alicia Kearns, Conservative):** ... In terms of the way in which we have approached counter-terrorism as a country, have we done enough to focus on the causes that drive and enable, or have we spent a lot more time focusing on the combating and defeating?

**Sir Alex Younger:** ... There is not a military solution to terrorism. The “pursue” constituency, of which I was a part, has a role in suppressing the effects of this and buying time but, fundamentally, it is about addressing the deeper causes of what is going on here. ... The reason why I like the CONTEST strategy is that it attempts to look at this problem much more holistically.

**Q134 Henry Smith (Conservative):** Broadly speaking, what would you say have been the successes and the failures of multilateral counter-terrorism efforts? ...

**Sir Alex Younger:** The most important principle is the most important lesson. Terrorism is not, ultimately, about the action, appalling and horrifying though that is. We saw it in 9/11. We saw it in 7/7. We saw it on 7 October. It is about the reaction. The point of terrorism is to make us more like terrorists. That is what is going on here. ... Of course, the proximate mission of the “pursue” community is to stop bombs going off, and that really matters, but the strategic objective is to do that in a way that preserves the distinction between us and our terrorist adversaries. ...

Second only to the ability to hold on to our values in the fight against terrorists is our ability to constitute partnerships. ... a beggar-your-neighbour approach to terrorism does not help anybody. It has to be done by like-minded countries—and, in fact, less like-minded countries—together in a way that prosecutes our objectives and sustains the distinction between us and the terrorist, but also recognises the enormous diversity of political conditions that exist. ...

**Q135 Sir Alex Younger:** ... We have a very long experience of terrorism. As a child, I was brought up with that threat. We all were. ...

Crucially, we learned some very hard lessons about teamwork and partnership, and developed very little tolerance for bureaucratic infighting ...

**Q136 Henry Smith:** If I could move on to what some of the drivers of terrorist activity may be ... Is it more a consequence of specific events and locations such as Gaza or Afghanistan, or more broadly a difficult political or economic situation in a given territory or area? Is it, as I suspect it may be, a combination of both?

**Sir Alex Younger:** ... You cannot pretend that the international environment, our foreign policy or the way in which the west is perceived are not significant drivers of all of this. ... There is plenty going on in the world that can be used to reinforce that message. ... The key one of those is the role that individuals, particularly charismatic individuals, play. ...

It always comes down to individuals, their capacity to influence, the networks that they have and, specifically, the downstream connectivity that they enjoy. The role of individuals in intensifying, focusing and exacerbating this is absolutely key. When you look at decisions taken by people who are being radicalised or are in danger of radicalisation, the role of individuals is really important.

The other key issue is, essentially, the domestic conditions and the environment where these messages are landing. It is about your experience specifically relating to identity, as much as economics: who you think you are and what it is like to live in a community where you have perhaps recently arrived in the UK or are a second-generation member of it. ...

**Q138 Bob Seely (Conservative):** ... you are talking about terrorism purely in terms of non-state actors. Twenty years ago, from the mid-90s through to maybe the early teens of this century—or, in fact, later than that, because of ISIS—the effort on terrorism was purely focused on non-state actors. To what extent now is it still only non-state actors? ...

**Sir Alex Younger:** ... we are in the time of the hybrid. We are being attacked across the spectrum of boundaries. Our distinctions between peace and war, or domestic and international—a lot of these things are ... being undermined by opponents who very happily move across these issues. ...

Do you see states actively galvanising terrorist groups to carry out their bidding? In the case of rogue states, that does happen. Where do you draw the line? ... It is really difficult to do. ...

**Q139 Bob Seely:** Do you think that they should be proscribed?

**Sir Alex Younger:** ... I can see the arguments on both sides. My personal view is that, if you have a terrorist organisation that is virtually synonymous with the state, you have to, ultimately, somehow deal with that state. ...

**Q140 Sir Alex Younger:** ... Ever since 9/11, terrorist groups have been obsessed by something that begins to match the strategic scale of that attack, which was profoundly paradigm changing and shocking. It just went beyond anything that anyone had seen before. They are desperate to achieve that, which means that they have always been quite interested in what we would call weapons of mass destruction of one type or another. ...

**Q146 Graham Stringer (Labour):** How might our foreign policy impact on the threat of terrorism to us? ...

**Sir Alex Younger:** There are two sides to this. There is the extent to which things that we do are seen as heightening the radicalisation risk. ...

To my mind, the bit where foreign policy really has traction is on the teamwork side. It is how you create a constellation of state effort that is what is necessary to deal with a networked threat, where laws, norms and cultures are very different in different countries, and where we, as I said at the beginning, must preserve the distinction between us and terrorists. Our values must drive everything that we do. ...

**Q148 Graham Stringer:** I did not write down the quote, but I think you said that there is, effectively, no military solution to terrorism. Can you expand on that? If there are actors out there—and there are—who want to set up a caliphate and have deep religious views and conviction, if you do not defeat them militarily, you are most unlikely to defeat them

ideologically, are you not?

**Sir Alex Younger:** It is a very good point. As I say those things, I am bound also to recognise that it was a military operation in Syria that got rid of the caliphate, which was a huge accelerator of the threat that we face. ...

It is also important to remember that many terrorist organisations have, essentially, political objectives, although not all. Arguably, Daesh does not, in fact, but many do. ...

**Q159 Sir Alex Younger:** My view is that it is important to define terrorism as a technique rather than separating it out by author ...

The reason why terrorism warrants the priority that is generally given by states like the UK is not that it is an existential threat. It is a pernicious threat to the social fabric of our societies and threatens to undermine the contract that exists between our citizens in a way that is fundamentally damaging.

I am asked a lot about the balance, for instance, between right-wing terrorism and Islamist terrorism. They are different. We have already talked about the way that, traditionally, Islamist terrorist groups organise. Right-wing groups do not appear to do that. In terms of the threat that they pose to our social fabric, it seems to me just as dangerous, if not more so, frankly. ...

**Q160 Sir Alex Younger:** ... Terrorism is an asymmetric activity. It is a tactical action that has a strategic effect. ...

**Q163 Bob Seely:** ... it does not matter so much where the threat comes from. You have to find the challenge to that threat in order to pacify it and, if you can solve bigger-term problems, that is great.

Logic then assumes that, if we are talking about the era of hybrid conflict, the greatest danger is going to be terrorist groups that are plugged into states. Do you recognise that as a new trend? Are you saying that that is not really a trend because you can say that the KGB was doing that back in the 1960s with Palestinian and Middle East terrorism ... or is this recognisably new or an evolution?

**Sir Alex Younger:** Regrettably, I absolutely do not think that it is new at all. ... The new feature will be the role that technology plays in propagating that more intensively.

**Q167 Chair:** ... When we look at Iranian terrorism, particularly in the Middle East and north Africa, although it also extends far beyond that, what are the most effective things that we should be doing to try to mitigate the worst excesses or to reduce the threat to the UK that emanates from the destabilising activities of the Iranian state?

**Sir Alex Younger:** ... What is being done to us, not just by Iran but by Russia and other states, is the hybrid. They have taken every aspect of state power—proxies, subversion and cyber—bent all that into a single strategic purpose, without regard to law or values, and deployed it across the spectrum. We are not going to do that, and I have talked about the need for us to retain our distinct ethical, moral and legal character, but we have something to learn about the teamwork aspects of this and the rigour of prioritising it against key strategic objectives.

My observation is that, if you are pressured or attacked in one way, you do not necessarily respond in kind. You put together the full panoply of the things that make you strong. It is going to sound like a truism, but you must have a whole of Government and cross-alliance response. ...

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**Q170 Henry Smith:** How would you say the IRGC identifies, develops and funds terror groups in the region?

**Professor Ansari (Professor of Iranian History, and Director, Institute for Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews):** ... the use of terror for political control is a fairly central plank of the Iranian regime's means of retaining control with its own population. What it does at home tends to then spread abroad, certainly within the region, and of late

it has decided to go a bit further afield. It does it through a variety of means, some more obvious, some less obvious. Some of it is obviously financing and supply. With some of the organisations in the Middle East itself, there are quite direct links to supply of arms and finance.

One of the more interesting, if troubling, aspects is the ideological expansion and the ideological education, so to speak, that they get engaged with. I do not know if I could say they do it at a professional level, but they do it at a pretty serious level. It is one of the areas that we are probably less prepared and less able to contend with, partly because the idea that one would engage in propaganda or ideological indoctrination is something that they have been able to maximise, using the gaps—not the weaknesses, but the available space—in liberal society to access those areas that we do not necessarily confront. ...

**Q171 Henry Smith:** Looking at those proxies, what do they give back to Iran in terms of the IRGC's geopolitical and global ambitions?

**Professor Ansari:** One of the first things they do is to validate them, really. I noticed that Ayatollah Khamenei has recently made a very generous endorsement of the various campus demonstrations that are going on in the United States to say how well they are following his lead, effectively.

What it does is to say things to dissidents and other critics within Iran. ... last time I was here, the Iranian regime was struggling to get a pro-Palestinian demonstration out in Iran. If they can then portray it and say, "Look what is going on abroad. They are all listening to us and they are all following our lead," it undermines some of the more dissident opinion within Iran itself, in a sense. ...

**Q172 Henry Smith:** When it comes to the proscription of the IRGC, this country has not proscribed it; the US has, as have others. How is Iran exploiting that? ...

**Professor Ansari:** ... Simply proscribing is not the solution ... My understanding is that it does not substantially add to the powers that we already have.

**Q173 Henry Smith:** ... do you think that the UK should be considering with its Middle East and broader allies around the world to try to counter Iranian state-sponsored terrorism?

**Professor Ansari:** We are doing something, obviously. As the security services have alerted us, there are things going on that they have managed to obstruct. We certainly need to be much clearer in terms of our partnerships and our objectives in the Middle East, what we want to do and how we want to confront the Iranians on the various things that they are doing. ...

**Q177 Fabian Hamilton (Labour):** ... Why do you think Iran has faced relatively limited pushback in the development of its proxy network over the years? We are not challenging those proxies. We are not saying, "You are just the tools of the Iranian state."

**Professor Ansari:** Part of the reason is the consequences of western policy in the region. ...

The further consequence of that is, of course, western fatigue. What we have witnessed from at least 2011, or maybe 2013, is a general western approach of, "We need to get the hell out of here as quickly as possible. Let us not get involved." ...

**Q178 Fabian Hamilton:** Do you think that the development of its proxy network is actually a key shortcoming in the West's counter-terrorism policy? In other words, could the development of Iran's proxy networks have been prevented in any way by the West?

**Professor Ansari:** To start from the beginning, when we first went into Iraq I remember I had gone to Iran in 2003 and talked to people in Iran. It was quite clear that the Iranians were taking advantage, in many ways, of the weaknesses that were developing in terms of the occupation.

At that stage, there was a tacit view among the coalition of the willing that the Iranian charity networks that were being developed in Iraq might not be a bad thing, because at

least it was enhancing a degree of stability. ...

The problem at the beginning was that, certainly on a regional level, we did not do enough to anticipate what was happening and what was going on on the ground, partly because of our own shortcomings and capacity to do things. ...

**Q181 Royston Smith:** Can I continue along the lines of Iranian proxies? Should the UK have a uniform strategy for dealing with those, or should it be a bespoke strategy for each of them? ...

**Professor Ansari:** In principle I am always in favour of bespoke strategies. There will be commonalities among a number of them, which you can deal with and generalise over, but you have to be better than they are at the games they play, if you will. Because there are many different proxy groups around, you should be able to find ways to make distinctions and sow difference among them. ...

**Q182 Royston Smith:** If we have a sustained strategy on Iranian proxies, and we name them as that and go after them as Iranian proxies, do we run the risk of inflaming the situation and making it worse? Iran has broken cover in its latest actions with Israel. Calling the Houthis “the Houthis” or Hezbollah “Hezbollah” is fine, but does calling them Iranian proxies and particularly going after them run the risk of inflaming the situation between us and Iran?

**Professor Ansari:** I do not think so. It all depends on how you calibrate the response and how targeted it is. One of the problems we have had is that, of late, we have tended to turn the other cheek rather too much. It is only recently that we have started to hit back. The problem is that, because we leave it so long to hit back, we often have to hit back much harder than we might have had to. ...

In many ways, the Iranians claim them anyway, so it does not really matter. It is not like they are hiding behind it. ...

Looking at the recent missile launches and whatever, if you looked at the messaging in Iran it was very jingoistic and gung-ho. They had videos of Israelis fleeing the country, settlers moving back to America and all this sort of thing. It is only abroad that they played this very moderate and cool hand, and basically protested that matters were concluded as the missiles were en route, which, as one colleague said, was about as bold an attempt at de-escalation as anyone had ever seen. They were not wasting their time on this.

In my view, the Iranian regime, even now it has put its head above the parapet, is very keen to get its head back under the parapet very quickly. I do not think the missile launch and other things put it in as good a light as it pretended they had. There is a view—but others will have a better idea—that its arsenal may not be quite as sophisticated as it has claimed it to be. A lot of its missiles did not fire at all.

There was a great comment, actually, by the Supreme Leader, who basically did a new take on, “It is not the winning; it is the taking part.” He basically said, “It does not matter that we did not hit anything; it is the fact that we did it,” which might have reassured some of his commanders and stuff, but it sounded a little bit like a spin too far, and an explanation and a spin for failure. ...

The problem with the politics of the Middle East and of Iran is that Iran, as has been said, has a very non-state element to its whole operation. We can look at the Iranian state as emblematic of this: in a way, it is a non-state actor in how it operates. It does not operate as a normal state, in that sense, and it does so partly as a defensive posture and partly as a means of extending its power. ...

**Q183 Royston Smith:** In a different way, then, is there any chance that pushing back on the proxies will help? Someone said—I do not know who—that the Iranians will fight the Israelis to the last Palestinian. Is there going to be a point where Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Hezbollah get exhausted, when they look back and think, “Actually, we are doing all the dirty work and now we are being pushed back on by western forces

or western intelligence”? At what point do they say, “Enough is enough”?

**Professor Ansari:** That is a very good point, because one reason the Iranians did break cover was precisely because a lot of their proxies were complaining that they were not doing anything. Of course, it will take some time to make an assessment of what the reaction is, but it seems to me that the reaction in the Arab world has been less than flattering. They sort of said, “Well, you have done something, but you have not actually done as much as you say you have done,” so there will come a time.

You have to bear in mind ... that the Iranian regime is doing things without the support of the vast majority of its own population. It is not just that it has frustrations among its allies, which it will, but it has frustrations and very serious grievances among its own people. ...

**Q189 Bob Seely:** ... As an academic, looking at this academic study of strategic culture, when you are talking about Iran and the regime being a non-state actor, I would interpret that as proof that the IRGC and the mullahs were effectively reliving through their founding culture and not adapting to being a fully state culture, because they almost feel happy behaving like some non-state actors or terrorists, while having the forces or the backing of a state to do it.

**Professor Ansari:** That is absolutely right. That is exactly how it operates. ...

**Q190 Brendan O'Hara (SNP):** ... In relation to the crisis in Gaza, how concerned should the UK be about increased Iranian activity here in the UK in response? How might that manifest itself? Also, has this crisis or will this crisis have an impact on levels of radicalisation here in the UK?

**Professor Ansari:** They are definitely taking advantage of it. There is no doubt that they are taking advantage of the fractures in society over Gaza. It is an opening for them, and it will certainly facilitate or enable radicalisation, which they will exploit. I do not think there is any doubt that that is a very serious possibility, or probably a probability. People are clearly aware of this—it is such a gaping wound, in some ways—and the Iranians are exploiting these social fractures.

**Q191 Brendan O'Hara:** In terms of how that would manifest itself, how would the Iranian regime manage to embed itself or get into those fractures, and how would we recognise it?

**Professor Ansari:** One of the easiest ways to recognise it has been some of the flags that people are carrying in the streets. It is not a secret. They carry Hezbollah or IRGC flags, or they have pictures of Khamenei. I have to say that I am quite staggered that this sort of stuff goes around in London and other places. Obviously it is a minority, but the fact is that it is there. You can see certain effects.

One of the great driving doctrines of the Islamic Revolution—I do not want to say Iran; I want to say the Islamic Revolution—is that the Israeli state is a cancer on the Middle East and has to be eliminated. It sees this as an opportunity to get this message across to disaffected and unhappy people in the west, who are reacting, obviously, to the terrible situation in Gaza. In some ways it is much more explicit in the United States, as you see on campuses. That is why it is no surprise that Khamenei will get up and endorse the student demonstrations and others, saying, “Look, they are finally rising up against their oppressor and listening to what I have said.”

I also found, much to my horror, I have to say, that there are some citizens of the United States—it has not happened here yet, as far as I know—who are being taught Iranian chants in Persian: “Death to America. Death to Israel.” The inanity of it is that even the people chanting it do not know what they are chanting, but they are saying it. The person doing it is a Press TV employee, so the link is very direct and clear.

**Q192 Chair:** On Press TV, just for clarity on the record, it continues to be a banned TV station in the UK. Is it your view that it is still the primary formation for the delivery of weaponised information against our state and others that exists for the Iranian regime?



**Professor Ansari:** I do not think it is the primary one, but it is certainly a major one. ...

**Q194 Royston Smith (Conservative):** Professor, you talked about flags being flown in London, but we have IRGC operatives carrying out their business in London. Is the UK sufficiently aware of what they are up to? What can they do to push back on it? ...

They are carrying out surveillance and much more nefarious things than that.

**Professor Ansari:** I do not think I would be as competent, really, or authoritative to say whether we know. My assumption would be that we would be aware—certainly the security services—and we would keep a tab on these things. I would certainly hope so, as an academic working on Iran, I have to say. ... I would like to see more pushback against this sort of behaviour and activity. ...

**Q195 Royston Smith:** Last time you were with us, you mentioned some of the Islamic centres that were funded directly by Iran. You said then as well that you did not think that we were pushing back enough on it.

**Professor Ansari:** Certainly, the Islamic centres are an issue that seems to drag on and on. We are not doing enough, really, to push back on them at all. As I said, the Islamic centre in Maida Vale very openly endorses a lot of Iranian propaganda and even IRGC propaganda. ...

**Q196 Professor Ansari:** I am on the board of a number of charities. If I am a charity, even a religious charity, what is the function of that religious charity? A religious charity should have fairly strict parameters about what it can and cannot do, and these should not seep into politics. They certainly should not seep into the radical politics that we are seeing. ...  
... many years ago I had an Iranian student who had been to a particular Islamic centre, not in London, as it happens, and he had listened to one of the clerics preaching. They were obviously preaching in Persian. He came back to me and said, “Do you have any idea what this guy is saying?” I said I had never been. It was not something I was familiar with. What this person was preaching was pretty horrendous. Even the Iranian students were coming back and saying, “Oh my god. It is not something we would be very happy with.” He was saying infidels should be eliminated and this, that and the other. This was a good 10 to 15 years ago, and people were saying to me, “He is there to preach to his flock and there are religious waivers for this sort of thing.” Clearly, one of the problems we have is that in Iran the religious and the political are not so distinct. They see them as flowing into each other.

The Islamic centre in Glasgow is another one that is pretty active in surveillance. We know what these religious centres do. While they act under the rubric of a religious charity, their activities are what I and any sensible person would deem political. Those political activities have to cease. You cannot have an Islamic centre going around surveilling what it considers to be dissident Iranians in London.

**Q197 Royston Smith:** ... We see what is happening in Gaza. It is the most horrific thing. We acknowledge and understand that. People are out on the streets protesting for the Palestinians and against the Israelis. There is a bigger picture. With all this disinformation, pushback and infiltration into the system, is there an element of our media and others just being a bit ignorant to it, so they fall into the same trap of saying, “This is all about Israel-Gaza and not about the bigger picture”? Therefore, if we see some Hezbollah flags or some IRGC flags, no one really cares too much about that.

**Professor Ansari:** Yes. ... You are absolutely right on that. They will focus on a particular topic, that will be the narrative, and that is what will take. That is what interests many people in this country, but they do not see the bigger picture.

The bigger picture is here, and it depends how you want to frame it. You can frame it on 7 October. You can frame it further back, more recently or whatever, but one of the salient features of the political situation in the Middle East and Iran is that Iran fundamentally does not agree with the existence of the state of Israel and is actively seeking measures to get rid of it. It is not just ignoring it.

When we ask, “What are the solutions? How do we get out of this morass?”, people say, “We need to sit down, have a dialogue and discuss peace.” How can you discuss peace with a partner that does not even acknowledge your right to exist? That has to be acknowledged.

**Royston Smith:** Yes, and it is not, mostly.

**Professor Ansari:** It is not. People do not.

**Q198 Professor Ansari:** The Netanyahu Government certainly have a lot to answer for, but the Iranians very effectively exploit the justifiable emotion and trauma of people seeing what is going on in Gaza. There is absolutely no doubt about that. What they are not talking about is their own role in perhaps undermining the peace processes we had over many years and in basically fomenting problems. That needs to be flagged up.

There is a sense among certain observers in the analytical community, think-tanks and others, as well as among journalists, that Iran in some ways is—I do not want to say “a victim”—a bit-part actor in all this, without seeing it as a much more central player. Again, I should emphasise—and let me be very clear—that I am talking about the regime. Most people in Iran are not remotely interested. ...

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Amendment Paper

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#### **Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill**

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

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

#### **Genocide Determination Bill**

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<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10023/CBP-10023.pdf>

## **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>

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(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)

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