



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

## Contents

Home Affairs

Holocaust

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Debate

#### Hajj Fraud

*col 609* **Nickie Aiken (Conservative):** ... Hajj is the fifth of the fundamental Muslim practices known as the five pillars of Islam, and is obligatory. ...

Despite its religious importance, many travelling from the UK to Mecca to perform Hajj are sadly not immune to targeting by fraudsters. ...

According to the police, only 3% of Hajj-related fraud is actually reported. ... Some may not wish to report the crime as they booked through a contact of someone they know in their community or from their mosque; others may wish not to complain due to embarrassment or shame. ... One of the reasons I applied for this debate is to send a clear message to our British Muslim community that they should feel safe and confident that they will be taken seriously if they report a suspected fraud. ...

*col 610* In my discussions with City of London police officers about Hajj-related fraud, they informed me that they have accidentally come across incidences of fraud, but are finding it increasingly difficult to receive reports of this crime. ...

Every year, 25,000 British Muslims travel to Mecca in Saudi Arabia to undertake their Hajj. Many will have saved for years in the knowledge that it will be a once in a lifetime trip. Brits who take part in the pilgrimage spend a combined £125 million each year. ... Data obtained from the police.uk website show that, sadly, police forces have reported Hajj-related fraud

where British citizens have lost anything from £1,000 up to a staggering £33,000 to fraudsters, who promised to arrange their Hajj travel and accommodation but had no intention of ever doing so, and were never heard from again. ...

*col 611* As we lead up to this year's Hajj, I thought it important to highlight the dangers that fraudsters can pose to our citizens at this special time, and to ensure that people know that there is a way to protect themselves from becoming victims of Hajj-related fraud. ...

In 2022, knowing that Hajj-related fraud was increasingly an issue, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Hajj and Umrah created the Nusuk Hajj portal, which has changed the way that individuals book their pilgrimage. The portal is available in over 50 countries, including the United Kingdom, and was created to provide a seamless and safe pilgrimage booking experience. ...

... Hajj-related fraud is not just about people buying a package that simply does not exist; it also involves profiteering from a sacred pilgrimage. ...

*col 612* **The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** ... The Government are committed to tackling both Hajj fraud and fraud more widely. ...

*col 613* We are also cracking down on fraudsters online. We know that many cases of Hajj fraud have an online element, which requires particular vigilance. ...

As my hon. Friend said, public awareness is critical, as is people taking steps to protect themselves. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-17/debates/8779C9B8-0466-4808-9F4D-FB9D0B77C8E3/HajjFraud>

TOP

## Holocaust

### House of Lords Debate

#### Third Reading: Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

**Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws (Labour):** ... the Bill came into being because of the horrifying global events we have all witnessed over recent years. The levels of violence and degradation are not new, but we thought that the experience of the Holocaust had taught the world lessons that might have enabled early intervention, possible diversion and maybe even prevention.

Genocides do not come from nowhere. They are invariably preceded by terrible atrocity crimes, and even before that there is a long trajectory. The whole point of this Bill is that, in retrospect, we should be responding to early displays of hostility, land grabs and the many different ways in which there are red flags as to trouble ahead. The Holocaust did not start with concentration camps. It started with evictions, sackings, trumped-up prosecutions, assaults by extremist thugs, humiliations and so on—for example, the whole business of cleaning streets with toothbrushes.

The events which led to this Bill were the horrors of what happened to the Yazidis ... Similar atrocities [that] happened to the Rohingya ... There is also the case of the Uighurs in China. ... the horrors of what happened, and is still happening, in Sudan in Darfur. We hear, of course, the language of genocide being discussed by Ukrainians about their current experience, and in the Middle East by both sides who perceive existential threat.

The Bill is designed to strengthen a very small atrocity unit created 18 months ago in the Foreign Office. It consists of three people, working on identifying and working around atrocity crimes. ...

The Bill has five key elements. First, it establishes that we monitor closely, as the Elie

Wiesel Act does in the United States of America, the red flags of potential genocides. Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, promoted that. Secondly, it establishes that a Commons Minister will respond to genocide prevention issues, have that as part of their remit and be directly responsible and accountable in Parliament. Thirdly, it establishes training for people entering the Foreign Office ... Fourthly, it establishes that that Minister will report regularly to Parliament. Fifthly, it establishes a small fund to assist particular victims. ...

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon):** ... The Bill has been an extremely important tool to bring focus to this important issue of atrocity prevention. ...

... there are many elements within the Bill that we are already undertaking and have committed to take forward. It proposes to establish a “genocide monitoring team”—we agree with that, and a dedicated unit is following this issue directly at the FCDO. ...

The Bill would provide for training for civil servants ... we have already invested in diplomats who have benefited from atrocity-prevention training. I am exploring options for making atrocity prevention training a requirement ...

The Bill calls for the Government to report to Parliament. We have the human rights report, but we are also looking to see how we can be more specific ...

We are all at one on trying to prevent atrocities. Sadly, and tragically, we are not succeeding in that objective around the world today. ... As the Minister with responsibility for such matters, I assure all noble Lords that we at the FCDO are very seized of this. ...

*Bill passed and sent to the Commons.*

**To read the full transcript see**

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-05-17/debates/AAA900C6-3B30-41B6-8A27-A985EB91B76F/Genocide\(PreventionAndResponse\)Bill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-05-17/debates/AAA900C6-3B30-41B6-8A27-A985EB91B76F/Genocide(PreventionAndResponse)Bill(HL))

TOP

## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### Israel: Military Aid

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [26282] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether an RAF Shadow R1 plane landed at Nevatim air base in Israel on 13 February 2024.

**Leo Docherty:** We will not comment on operational activity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-14/26282>

#### Air Force: Israel

**Matt Western (Labour)** [25309] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Royal Air Force flights have travelled to Israel (a) since October 7 2023 and (b) between October 2022 and October 2023.

**Leo Docherty:** There have been 59 Royal Air Force aircraft that have travelled to Israel from 7 October 2023 to 9 May 2024. There were 15 Royal Air Force flights to Israel from October 2022 to October 2023.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/25309>

#### Air Force: Israel

**Matt Western (Labour)** [25313] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the purpose of UK military flights travelling to Israel since 7 October 2023 has been.

**Leo Docherty:** Royal Air Force operated planes travelling to 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/2024-05-08/25313>

### **Gaza: Armed Forces**

**Matt Western (Labour)** [25310] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether armed forces personnel have been deployed in Gaza since 7 October 2023.

**Leo Docherty:** No UK Armed Forces personnel have been on the ground in Gaza in any capacity since 7 October 2023.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/25310>

### **Israel: Arms Trade**

**Matt Western (Labour)** [25311] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the Government has sold arms to Israel since 1 April 2024.

**James Cartlidge:** The UK government has not sold arms to Israel since 1 April 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/25311>

### **Israel: Defence Equipment**

**Matt Western (Labour)** [25312] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make an assessment of the origin of (a) munitions and (b) hardware used by the Israel Defence Force in the drone strikes that killed World Central Kitchen aid workers in Gaza on 1 April 2024.

**Leo Docherty:** The Government is carefully reviewing Israel's Fact Finding and Assessment Mechanism (FFAM)'s initial findings of their investigations into the killing of World Central Kitchen aid workers and welcome the suspension of two officers as a first step. The findings of the investigation must be published in full and followed up with a wholly independent review to ensure the utmost transparency and accountability.

We continue to monitor the situation in Israel and Gaza closely but are not commenting on specific licences.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/25312>

### **Nadav Popplewell**

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [26280] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether his Department shared intelligence on the location of British hostage Nadav Popplewell in Gaza with the IDF.

**Leo Docherty:** We will not comment further on detailed intelligence matters.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-14/26280>

### **Nadav Popplewell**

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [26281] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the claim by Hamas that British hostage Nadav Popplewell has died as a result of an IDF airstrike.

**Leo Docherty:** The UK Government is working with partners across the region to secure the release of hostages, including British nationals. We continue to do all we can to secure the release of the hostages. It would not be right to comment further until the facts of the matter are ascertained.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-14/26281>

### **Layan Nasir**

**Desmond Swayne (Conservative)** [24356] To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations the Church

has made to the Israeli government to secure the release of Layan Nasir from administrative detention.

**Andrew Selous:** On 9<sup>th</sup> April the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, issued the following short statement in response to the news that Layan Nasir, a member of an Anglican congregation in the occupied West Bank, had been arrested by Israeli forces.

"I'm shocked and deeply concerned by this news. Together with our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, I pray for Layan and her family - and for the congregation of St Peter's Anglican Church in the Occupied West Bank. Please pray for Layan's safety and swift release." The Bishop of Southwark, Christopher Chessun, joined the Archbishop's call for prayers and her release.

On 28<sup>th</sup> April the Archbishop renewed his appeal for the release of Layan Nasir, who I understand is being held in Damon Prison, in Israel. A spokesperson for Lambeth Palace told Sky News:

"He is deeply concerned to learn that she is now facing administrative detention for four months, without charge and with no due process for her, her family, or lawyers to challenge this. Such processes against what is already a deeply threatened minority are contrary to commitments given over the years. This, along with daily harassment of Christian laity and clergy in East Jerusalem, indicates the predicament that many Christians now face in the West Bank and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As the Occupying Power, the State of Israel is obliged by International Law to protect those at risk."

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Guli Francis-Dehqani, met with members of the family of Layan Nasir last week during a visit to the Occupies Palestinian Territories. I understand from Church House officials that conversations are ongoing with both the Israeli and the British Government regarding Layan Nasir's release from administrative detention.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/24356>

## House of Lords Written Answers

### Occupied Territories: War Crimes

**The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative)** [HL4344] To ask His Majesty's Government what information they have on the progress of the International Criminal Court's investigation into the Situation in the State of Palestine, announced by the Prosecutor on 3 March 2021 and covering crimes alleged to have been committed since 13 June 2014.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** Our position on the ICC's investigation into the situation in the OPTs has not changed.

The UK is a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court and we fully respect the independence of the Court.

As a State Party to the Geneva Conventions, 1949, the Israeli Government is obliged to take action against Israeli nationals accused of grave breaches of International Humanitarian Law. It is for the Israeli domestic judicial system to try or extradite those accused of grave breaches.

We continue to call for International Humanitarian Law to be respected and civilians to be protected. It is vital that all parties ensure that their actions are proportionate, necessary and minimise harm to civilians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-02/hl4344>

*Information about the ICC investigation referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/palestine>

## UNRWA

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL4288] To ask His Majesty's Government what reassurances they have sought from the government of Israel regarding their cooperation with the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services investigation into the allegations made against UNRWA.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** 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 (OIOS) investigation into these allegations.

We continue to urge Israel and all parties with relevant information to cooperate fully with the OIOS investigation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/hl4288>

*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>

## UNRWA: Finance

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL4289] To ask His Majesty's Government on the basis of what evidence they have continued to suspend funding to UNRWA despite other allies, including Germany, having restored funding to the agency.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/hl4289>

*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>

## Palestinians: Refugees

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL4290] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the risk to Palestinian refugees caused by efforts to abolish UNRWA.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We recognise the essential and pivotal role that UNRWA plays in providing health and education services and humanitarian relief to Palestinian refugees. The United Nation's General Assembly voted on 12 December 2022 to extend UNWRA's mandate until 30 June 2026.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/hl4290>

*Information about the UN vote referred to above can be read at*

<https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12481.doc.htm>

## Scottish Parliament Motions

**James Dornan (SNP) [S6M-13275] FIFA Congress and Israel** – That the Parliament notes that the 74th FIFA Congress is taking place on 17 May 2024 in Bangkok; understands that FIFA will carry out a legal assessment before it makes a decision on Palestine's call to suspend the Israeli federation over the war in Gaza; notes that the Scotland National Women's Team is due to meet Israel on 31 May 2024; further notes the suspension by FIFA of Russia and Russian teams following the invasion of Ukraine, and believes that a similar ban should apply to Israel and its teams; acknowledges the reported ruling by the International Court of Justice and the view that there may be a case to answer that the actions of Israel in Gaza constitute genocide against the Palestinian people, and considers that any state found to have caused a plausible risk of genocide should not be afforded sporting opportunities and should be banned from all competitions with immediate effect.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-13275>

*The 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>

**Maggie Chapman (Green) [S6M-13259] Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association** – That the Parliament congratulates the Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association on the exhibition, Nablus and Dundee: 44 Years of Twinning, held at Dundee Central Library between 9 and 17 May 2024; notes that the exhibition includes information about the history, geography and culture of Nablus, the Nakba and consequent refugee camps, the many visits and delegations between the two cities, and the Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association's current campaigns, including those to support student nurses and midwives and to plant olive trees in the region; applauds the solidarity event held at the library on 14 May by the Dundee-Nablus Twinning Association and Arts Workers for Palestine Dundee, at which participants shared readings of and reflections on Palestinian poetry; recalls that, in 1980, Dundee was the first city in the world to twin with a city in occupied Palestine; congratulates the Association and the people of Nablus and Dundee on maintaining what it sees as this active and positive relationship over the subsequent 44 years, building friendship, understanding and collaboration on many projects; considers that such relationships are especially important at this time, when the people of Palestine are experiencing what it considers to be unconscionable violence and deprivation, and expresses its best wishes and gratitude to the Association for its continued work.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-13259>

## United Nations

### **Nakba of 1948 and Today Are Not Separate Events, but Ongoing Process of Palestinian Displacement, Replacement, Speakers Tell Panel, Urging Immediate Ceasefire in Gaza**

... Cheikh Niang (Senegal), Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People... recalled that the Committee hosted the first-ever UN commemoration of the Nakba to observe its seventy-fifth anniversary in 2023. "Today, we again commemorate the events of 1948 and subsequent years, which led to the dispossession and displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians from their ancestral lands," he said. After the atrocities committed by Hamas and other militant groups on 7 October 2023, "the Israeli response was and continues to be disproportionate and indiscriminate". He asserted that "breaches of norms by one group do not excuse breaches of international law and norms by another". Calling the development over the

past seven months “unparalleled in recent history”, he noted that almost 40,000 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 80,000 injured — the vast majority women and children. “That is 1 in every 25 Gazans killed,” he deplored.

“The Nakba of 1948 and today’s Nakba in Gaza are not two separate, distinct events,” he said, highlighting Israel’s ongoing actions all that time in between, including occupation and dispossession of Palestinian property, denial of rights, arbitrary arrests including of children, brutal and disproportionate use of force, Judaization of East Jerusalem and its cultural symbols, eviction and displacement of its inhabitants. The Nakba, thus, is an ongoing process affecting the Palestinian people over generations. ...

Nobody is above the law, and grave breaches of international law and norms must have consequences. “We call on the international community — Member States and civil society alike — to redouble our efforts to end the occupation, end this ongoing Nakba, and bring to reality the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence and a just resolution to the plight of Palestine refugees,” he said. ...

**Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine**, said that “the Nakba encompasses both a personal tragedy for every Palestinian family and a collective deed”. It is a historic injustice endured by an entire nation, a majority of which was uprooted overnight from its ancestral land while the rest were treated like strangers in their own country. “The Nakba is an enterprise of displacement and replacement of people that continues to this very day,” he said, adding that it took 75 years for the UN to recognize and commemorate it. Moreover, he emphasized, it is a terrible reality still endured by the Palestinian people, “as Israel has yet to abandon its plans to push us out of history and geography”. The people in Gaza are besieged, bombed and starved with the aim of their destruction or removal. The Israeli Government no longer hides its true intentions of “a second Nakba”, leaving the Palestinians with three options: displacement, subjugation, or deaths — in other words, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, or genocide.

However, he underscored that there is now universal recognition of the Palestinian people, and soon, it will be matched by universal recognition of the Palestinian State. There is a global consensus to end the Israeli occupation, fulfil Palestinian rights, and have two States — Palestine and Israel — living side by side. “It is time for accountability and justice so freedom and peace can be achieved,” he declared, stressing that Gaza is composed mainly of refugees who endured the Nakba and must live through it once again. ...

The Committee then heard a series of poems by **Zeina Azzam, a Palestinian-United States writer, poet, editor and community activist**, which explored themes of war, displacement and the experiences of refugees and immigrants. ...

... “Write My Name” — was written after learning that some parents in Gaza resorted to writing their children’s names on their legs to help identify them should they be killed, she said. “Write my name on my leg, Mama,” she wrote, “and on the legs of my sisters and brothers — this way we will belong together, this way we will be known as your children”. The last stanza read: “Write my name on my leg, Mama. When the bomb hits our house, when the walls crush our skulls and bones, our legs will tell the story — how there was nowhere for us to run.” ...

**Ardi Imseis, Assistant Professor and Academic Director at Queen’s University, Ottawa**, said that “it is exceedingly difficult to speak about the Nakba in a manner that sufficiently captures the enormity of the Palestinian predicament”. What the Palestinian people have been enduring for three-quarters of a century is a singular experience of an unmitigated disaster of the sustained and concerted effort to do away with their collective and national existence in their native land. The Nakba is “a structure, not an event”. Yet, little to nothing is being done to stop it by those in a position to do so. ...

Turning to “the fateful decision made by the then Western-dominated General Assembly” to recommend the partition of Palestine against the will of the country’s indigenous population through resolution 181 of 29 November 1947, he pointed out that a review of



the terms of the partition plan and the accompanying UN record ... reveals that the plan was illegal under prevailing international law. The terms of that plan revealed an absolute contempt for the principle of self-determination of Palestinians. ...

**Karameh Kuemmerle, Assistant Professor and M.D., Harvard Medical School**, a co-founder of Doctors against Genocide, said the Nakba is the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, “a word that does not do justice to the ongoing complete denial of their human rights and self-determination”. A culmination of the settler-colonial legacy in their homeland, this genocide is a disease with many symptoms — mass killing, mass expulsion, forced eviction, unlawful settlement, land confiscation, pogroms and detention. “I am a clinician and, as clinicians, we diagnose,” she said, noting the failure to formally recognize the Nakba as genocide despite meeting all the criteria of clear intent, organization, and preparation for the crime. This includes arming militias with the explicit purpose of carrying out atrocities, as documented in declassified Israeli archives. She also highlighted that the international community’s complicity in legitimizing these heinous acts “has only empowered the perpetrators”.

On the contrary, she continued, the international community rewarded the perpetrators by recognizing their State. In this regard, South Africa’s genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice aims to ensure that the perpetrators of the Nakba are finally held accountable. She further underlined that proposals such as the two-State solution faced opposition from Israel, which views the Palestinians as “security or demographic threats”. “They demanded re-education of the Palestinians and constant reassurance of permanent security from us while our people were the ones violated, violently abused, and marginalized,” she said, adding that “some stated that the illegal settlements were needed for the Israeli security”. ...

**Phyllis Bennis, Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies**, recalled that 1948 saw the birth of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. However, it also gave rise to Apartheid in South Africa and the Nakba in Palestine. ... The United States is “arming genocide” through its provision of both military aid and “absolute impunity” to Israel, she stressed, noting that three times as many people have been killed in Gaza than during the original Nakba in 1948 ...

**The representative of South Africa** said Israel’s actions in Rafah — part of its end game to destroy Gaza completely — are evidence of its genocidal intent. Calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, she warned that the evacuation zones that Israel has ordered the people to go to are basically “the extermination zones”. ...

A speaker representing a delegation of rabbis then took the floor to point out that “Jews have always been able to live amongst Arabs and Muslims” and to condemn those who “use the façade of my religion — that my grandparents died in Auschwitz for — as a stick to stifle those opposing stealing the homes of Palestinians”. Recalling that those who opposed Apartheid were called “terrorists”, he underscored that this occupation — like Apartheid — will end so people “can live and serve God together in freedom”. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/gapal1467.doc.htm>

*General Assembly Resolution 181, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ARES181II.pdf>

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**‘Brand new words’ needed to describe Gaza devastation, UN humanitarian says**

Yasmina Guerda, UN Humanitarian Affairs Officer (centre), talks with a Palestinian woman in Rafah, Gaza, in March 2024.

**Yasmina Guerda:** We would need to invent brand new words to adequately describe the situation that Palestinians in Gaza find themselves in today. No matter where you look, no

matter where you go, there's destruction, there's devastation, there's loss. There's a lack of everything. There's pain. There's just incredible suffering. People are living on top of the rubble and the waste that used to be their lives. They're hungry. Everything has become absolutely unaffordable. ...

Access to clean water is a daily battle. Many people haven't been able to change clothes in seven months because they just had to flee with whatever they were wearing. ...

One of the things that I find absolutely striking is the people's determination to keep moving forward, to keep looking up no matter what.

I was walking through a camp recently and there were several families who had dug their own makeshift septic tank with spoons in the sand, grabbing pipes and toilet tanks from destroyed buildings so that they can have something that resembles a restroom, because the situation here for water and sanitation is extremely dire. ...

This is my second deployment to Gaza. I was here four weeks ago, and in four weeks everything has changed, including how you get in and out of Gaza and how you bring in supplies. Most of the population used to be in Rafah because that was the safer area back then. But now, of course, 630,000 people in 10 days have packed up whatever they had and gone north or towards the coastal areas. ...

On the last week of my deployment, [seven humanitarian colleagues](#), who also happened to be friends, were killed by Israeli airstrikes. And the day that I arrived for my second deployment, two humanitarians were again struck. ...

It's really unprecedented how utterly difficult it is to bring staff and supplies into Gaza. This was always the case since 7 October, but since 7 May, when the main border crossing for aid closed - the Rafah crossing - our storage facilities have been destroyed and looted. ...

I calculated that this is about six people killed per hour on average, mostly women and children. We know that. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://news.un.org/en/interview/2024/05/1149946>

## UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

### **Relief agency UNRWA targeted politically over partiality claims, funding must resume: UN experts**

UN experts expressed disappointment today that some States have yet to reinstate funding weeks after an independent review showed a lack of evidence for partiality claims against the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

"The independent review ordered by the UN Secretary-General, following an increase of allegations since the onset of the military assault on Gaza in October 2023, has shown that the claim that significant numbers of UNRWA employees have ties with 'terrorist organisations' remains unsubstantiated," the experts said.

They welcomed the review's conclusions that UNRWA has a very developed approach to neutrality, with effective control mechanisms to address neutrality concerns.

"This indicates that UNRWA has yet again been targeted politically at critical moments—raising serious questions about accountability for the damage inflicted both on UNRWA and on the Palestinians in Gaza that the agency serves," said the experts, recalling that other UN humanitarian and human rights bodies and mechanisms, including independent experts, have been subject to verbal and other attacks on their integrity and impartiality in the past several months. ...

"We back the European Union's call for those international donors holding out to resume funding to UNRWA," they said. States should fully reinstate funding without delay.

"We recognise UNRWA's determination to implement its mandate under unprecedented and enormous risks," the experts said. "189 UNRWA staff have been killed in Israeli bombardments since 7 October 2023—the highest number of UN staff killed in any conflict

since the UN's founding in 1945." ...

Experts warn that 1.7 million people are internally displaced, mostly women and 600,000 children in the Rafah area alone, and they need food assistance, shelter, healthcare, education, water, sanitation and hygiene.

"It is imperative that once funding to UNRWA is reinstated to the fullest, UNRWA be fully recognised and protected both as a subsidiary body of the United Nations General Assembly, epitomising among others the permanent responsibility of the United Nations toward the Question of Palestine, and for its pivotal role in many areas of life of Palestinian refugees," the experts said.

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/relief-agency-unrwa-targeted-politically-over-partiality-claims-funding-must>

*The independent review 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)

TOP

## Foreign Affairs

### House of Commons Debate

#### **Third Reading: Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill**

*col 557* **Fiona Bruce (Conservative):** ... It is pertinent that this is a private Member's Bill because, while it implements recommendation 6 of the Truro review and is therefore implementing a manifesto commitment, its origins are on the Back Benches of the Commons and the Lords. In 2013, the inaugural report of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief recognised the challenge for attention and concern for the right to freedom of religion or belief—as in article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights—and described it as “an orphaned right”. This Bill will ensure that the office of the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief is secured as a permanent fixture in statute, and will embed the progress that the UK has made in promoting the fundamental and universal human right to freedom of religion or belief around the world.

Since the all-party parliamentary group first produced that report, it has grown in number to more than 180 parliamentarians. I believe it is the largest all-party group in this place. ... Some may point out that having a special envoy in statute would be unprecedented, but if the objection to any change was simply that it was unprecedented, we would never make any progress. Indeed, that is why we are here in this place—to make legislative change. What is unprecedented is that people have never been more heinously and despicably denied their wish to live out their beliefs. They have never experienced, in the numbers they do today, more abuse, emotional or material hardship, incarceration, or even death, simply on account of what they believe. I hope to give some examples of that a little later in my speech.

*col 558* In the time that I have been the UK's Prime Minister's special envoy—from late 2020—we have seen such an increase in instances of concern. There has not just been an increase in the number of authoritarian regimes; we have also seen new challenges to freedom of religion or belief through ever increasingly sophisticated technology used to oppress people, and the darkly sinister expansion of transnational repression. ...

*col 559* ... the influence that religious leaders can have in bringing communities together and preventing ... atrocities ... cannot be overstated. ...

The role I have gives the UK an additional privilege: that of holding out the importance of

freedom of religion or belief across the world. However, the men, women and children around the world who suffer—whether under the hard arm of authoritarian regimes or at the ruthless whim of militant mobs—need not just our voices, but our partnership. They need not just our words, but our actions; not just our intentions, but our effective help. That is why the role of envoy ...

There is only one other country in the world with a similar office. The US has had a permanent office promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief for over 25 years. The stability of that office over time has ensured a build-up of resources, expertise and research capabilities that enable it to make a significant contribution towards combating FORB abuses across the world.

The UK may be smaller, but if we had such an office, and secured and resourced it as a continuation of the office that I have the privilege of holding at present, it would enable us to speak across the world with a powerful voice for good. ...

**col 560 Nickie Aiken (Conservative):** ... Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is about not only freedom of religion, but freedom of belief? At the heart of the Bill is freedom for people to feel what they feel, whatever their religion.

**Fiona Bruce:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. ... “Belief” indicates that there are some who do not hold a religious belief but who are equally entitled to our support, advocacy and protection on account of their beliefs, whatever they are. ...

**col 561** Apart from challenging autocratic regimes ... standing up for those whose basic human rights have been trampled over simply because of their beliefs can make all the difference in the world ...

**col 562 Karen Bradley (Conservative):** ... Mr Deputy Speaker, you are one of the most amiable and approachable chaps I know, but I suspect that many of your constituents find it easier to speak to their local priest, rabbi or other religious leader than to you, because of the trust that people have in the religious and faith leaders they interact with. Therefore, it is incredibly important for you to have a dialogue with your faith leaders, as it is for all of us here, because it is how we find out about what is going on for our constituents and how we can get support to them. We cannot overstate the importance of faith and its interaction with politics, and how we must all be part of it.

**Fiona Bruce:** ... We have a working group on interfaith dialogue, which was launched this year, and we are calling for contributions of good examples of such dialogue from around the world. ...

**Thérèse Coffey (Conservative):** ... The challenge that people of faith face around the world is so acute that creating this special role permanently, as Parliament wishes, is a really important step in ensuring that one of people’s most fundamental freedoms—freedom of religion or belief—is protected. ...

**col 564** ... it is important to note that this role has evolved, and is now not simply about Christianity. Events targeting Christianity were the initial trigger, and gave rise to the Foreign Office working on this, but my hon. Friend has spoken eloquently about the need to expand the role further, and has undertaken to do that. ...

We need people who can focus solely on these matters. The Bill does not require them to be politicians. ...

**Lisa Cameron (Conservative):** ... The Prime Minister’s special envoy for freedom of religion or belief plays a role that is so important to many people internationally ... and the post firmly places the UK in a leadership role in this area. ...

**col 565 Catherine West (Labour):** ... Freedom of religion or belief is a core tenet of fundamental human rights, and human rights will always be at the heart of Labour’s outlook on the world and the centre of the shaping of our foreign policy. ...

In many countries, including the UK, religious freedom is taken for granted, and people can worship or choose not to worship, whatever their belief, but that is sadly not the case in vast swathes of the world. There has been a growing trend in recent years for religious

minorities to be persecuted simply for the beliefs that they cherish so dearly. ...  
col 566 While freedom of religion or belief does not necessarily conflict with either LGBTQ+ issues or the rights of women and girls to reproductive health, it would be wrong to give the impression of putting rights in a hierarchy. ...

In recent weeks, a representative for humanitarian affairs was appointed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; that demonstrates how important these roles are. ...

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** ... the Bill will make the role of the special envoy for freedom of religion or belief statutory. Establishing the role permanently and in perpetuity was a recommendation in the Bishop of Truro's 2019 independent review of the work of the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office on freedom of religion or belief, and the implementation of that recommendation was a manifesto commitment for the Conservatives in 2019.

This Bill will ensure that the special envoy has clearly defined duties, that they will report to the Prime Minister on their work and that a Minister of the Crown must provide resources for the special envoy to carry out their functions. It reinforces the Government's long-standing commitment to FORB for all, which will support us in continuing to embed freedom of religion or belief within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Perhaps most significantly, it will ensure that the positive work being undertaken by today's special envoy in this human rights priority area will be continued by future role holders. ...

col 567 Another achievement of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton, with my noble Friend the Minister for human rights, Lord Ahmad, was hosting the fourth international ministerial conference in 2022. This event brought together Government delegations, faith and belief group leaders, human rights actors and civil society from over 100 countries to address the challenges to the right to freedom of religion or belief. ...

On a more sobering note, the scale of abuses and violations of the right to FORB across the world remain deeply concerning ... And history has shown us that, too often, where freedom of religion or belief is under threat, other human rights are at risk too.

We are firm in our position that no one should be persecuted, abused or intimidated because of their religion or belief, or lack thereof. Protecting and promoting the right to FORB has been a long-standing commitment of this Government, and the FCDO is working on this in a number of ways, including through our multilateral and bilateral work, to embed FORB across our programmes. ...

col 568 To conclude, His Majesty's Government are committed to protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief for all. The Bill cements our commitment to the role of special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, and delivers on our manifesto commitment to implement the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's review. ...

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-17/debates/77ACEF5C-707D-4B73-9D67-DF24C636D250/SpecialEnvoyForFreedomOfReligionOrBeliefBill>

*The Truro Review, referred to above, can be read at*

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

*The APPG report referred to above by Fiona Bruce is not currently available online.*

TOP

## Relevant Legislation \*\* new or updated today

### UK Parliament

#### **Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill**

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

#### **\*\* Criminal Justice Bill**

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

Amendment Paper

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal\\_rm\\_rep\\_0520.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0520.pdf)

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Genocide Determination Bill**

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

#### **\*\* Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill**

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

Third Reading, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-05-17/debates/AAA900C6-3B30-41B6-8A27-A985EB91B76F/Genocide\(PreventionAndResponse\)Bill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-05-17/debates/AAA900C6-3B30-41B6-8A27-A985EB91B76F/Genocide(PreventionAndResponse)Bill(HL))

#### **\*\* Holocaust Memorial Bill**

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

Amendment Paper

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0007/amend/holocaust\\_rm\\_cwh\\_0520.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0007/amend/holocaust_rm_cwh_0520.pdf)

#### **Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill**

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

#### **\*\* Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill**

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

Third Reading, House of Commons

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-17/debates/77ACEF5C-707D-4B73-9D67-DF24C636D250/SpecialEnvoyForFreedomOfReligionOrBeliefBill>

#### **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill**

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

## Scottish Parliament

### **Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill**

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

### **Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill**

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

TOP

## Consultations

\*\* new or updated today

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

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

### **Review of the RSHE statutory guidance** (closing date 11 July 2024)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/rshe-team/review-of-the-rshe-statutory-guidance/>

TOP

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