



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 Written Answers

Social Media: Regulation

Nicola Richards (Conservative) [25724] To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, whether she has had recent discussions with (a) the Mental Health Foundation, (b) the Antisemitism Policy Trust and (c) other civil society organisations on the regulation of online forums that allow the sharing of (i) detailed instructional information about methods of suicide and (ii) other (A) dangerous and (B) hateful content; and whether she plans further such discussions.

Saqib Bhatti: The Secretary of State and department officials have regular meetings and discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society groups, on online safety issues. During the development and passage of the Online Safety Act, the department and Ministers met with relevant civil society organisations to discuss issues such as suicide prevention and countering online hate and violence, to ensure the legislation took into account as broad a range of views as possible.

Following the Act gaining Royal Assent, there is ongoing engagement with relevant stakeholders as the legislation is implemented by Ofcom, the online safety regulator.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-10/25724>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Hate Crimes Against Muslim Women

Baroness Gohir (Crossbench): To ask His Majesty's Government how they plan to reduce hate crimes against Muslim women and to what extent their plans involve engaging with diverse Muslim women's groups across the country. ...

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Swinburne): My Lords, anti-Muslim hatred is abhorrent and has no place in our society. From ensuring the safety of worshippers and working with the police to supporting victims, we will continue to take swift action to address anti-Muslim hatred, and this includes safeguarding Muslim women. We are committed to tackling anti-Muslim hatred through a co-ordinated cross-departmental effort. To this end, we will provide £117.6 million to protect mosques and Muslim faith schools across the country until 2028.

Baroness Gohir: I thank the Minister for meeting me last week, when I shared concerns about Tell MAMA, in that Muslim communities do not have trust and confidence in Tell MAMA. I have written a letter to the Government with 31 questions about Tell MAMA, and the Government have not answered them. ... when will Tell MAMA's data be made available in full? When will Tell MAMA's poor governance and the quality of its work be assessed? When will its funding be reviewed? It gets around £1 million a year, and no one knows what it does with this money. Why the lack of transparency when it comes to Tell MAMA?

Baroness Swinburne: We have funded Tell MAMA since 2012 to monitor and support victims of anti-Muslim hatred. Tell MAMA is subject to internal grant funding review processes and due diligence checks. This is the case for all funded partners' processes before any funding agreement can be processed annually. Therefore, Tell MAMA engages regularly with DLUHC officials monitoring its progress. ...

Baroness Hussein-Ece (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, British Muslim women have borne the brunt of the sharp rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes, as the noble Baroness has mentioned, but there are well-established women's groups that have been at the forefront of providing follow-up support for many who do not feel able to report some of these crimes to the police or even to other groups, including those mentioned today. Have there been any reviews or evaluations, particularly of Prevent funds that could be redirected to Muslim women's groups and organisations that have years of experience in providing support and education for women and their families?

Baroness Swinburne: I assure the noble Baroness that there is extensive engagement to understand the issues affecting British Muslims, including Muslim women. ...

Baroness Warsi (Conservative): My Lords, it pains me to stand up on this Question, particularly when we are talking about an organisation that should be dealing with monitoring anti-Muslim hatred. ... To some extent I bear responsibility, as I was there when the organisation was set up. There are deep concerns about its finances, governance, associations and connections, including with the now-defunct Quilliam Foundation—which has associations with think tanks in the United States that are peddling anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia—and with people whom successive Home Secretaries have excluded from the United Kingdom. These are really serious allegations about an organisation that is there to protect Muslims in the United Kingdom. I urge my noble friend to look at these matters seriously. It is important that organisations funded by the Government to protect British nationals of whatever faith have the confidence of the communities they seek to protect.

Baroness Swinburne: ... I have taken up this matter since I came into this position. The department is being asked to investigate and look at all the matters raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Gohir, and others.

Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated): My Lords, notwithstanding the concerns raised by the noble Baronesses, Lady Gohir and Lady Warsi, I am also aware of many of the allegations in their questions. I have worked with Muslim women for subsequent Governments for at least 26 years, while I have been in the House and long before. What assurance can British Muslim women take from a prolonged absence of any meaningful engagement or action to address their experiences of discrimination inside, outside, at work and within the institutions that serve them? ...

Baroness Swinburne: I would like to reassure the House that we have conducted extensive engagement over the last year in particular. The DLUHC Secretary of State hosted a round table with Muslim experts in late 2023 to hear of their experiences and feedback. Ministers have also conducted visits to a broad range of community groups to increase understanding and to see the valuable work that many Muslim community groups are doing. We are engaged in these matters, and this is one of many things we are doing to try to combat some of the issues that Muslim women in particular are facing.

Baroness Sherlock (Labour): My Lords, as the shadow Faith Minister, I hear increasing reports when I meet faith communities that their members are feeling unsafe in our country. ... Muslim women—especially hijabi women—are very often on the front line of Islamophobia on our streets.

The Government have refused to bring forward a new hate crime strategy, even though the old one is four years old and out of date, and we are seeing soaring levels of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Can the Minister tell the House who the Government consulted before making their decision? ...

Baroness Swinburne: His Majesty's Government have publicly confirmed ... that they do not intend to publish a new hate crime strategy. However, we remain committed to protecting all communities from crime and we have a number of programmes in place to do so. For example, the Government have worked with the police to fund True Vision, an online hate crime reporting portal designed so that victims of all types of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. We also fund the national online hate crime hub, a central capability designed to support individual local police forces in dealing with online hate crime. This is a cross-departmental piece of work. We are working with every department to try to make sure we cover all bases.

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, is it not important to ensure that young Muslim girls know how they should be treated when they are in the community, and where they can go for help? One of our best academy trusts is Star Academies, which runs Muslim faith schools. In light of the problems that have been outlined, can my noble friend perhaps beef up the teaching and the education in our schools to ensure that young Muslim people know where to go for help and what their expectation of how they are to be treated should be?

Baroness Swinburne: I totally agree ... It is really important that we make sure that everyone has the necessary skills to deal with this appropriately.

Lord Sahota (Labour): My Lords, I recently read a report saying that more and more Sikh women are wearing turbans and are often the victims of hate crime as well. Are the Government engaged with any programmes or funding for Sikh women who are the victims of these hate crimes?

Baroness Swinburne: I will check for the noble Lord what specific engagement there has been. I am aware that there is cross-faith group engagement ... for all religions and all groups, including women from those faith groups.

Baroness Manzoor (Conservative): My Lords, I welcome the action the Government are taking to ensure much greater integration. My concerns are disadvantaged women in society and their access to health. Can my noble friend tell me whether they are looking not only at hate crime but at access to NHS services?

Baroness Swinburne: ... It is really important that, in all walks of life, nobody feels

they are being discriminated against. It is therefore important to make sure that everybody has the necessary skills to raise their concerns and that there are avenues available to do so. I will raise this with my noble friend the Minister for Health to make sure we cover it adequately. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-05-20/debates/F90BB0E1-FA54-4B6C-A635-039B0E1BCD8B/HateCrimesAgainstMuslimWomen>

The True Vision portal, referred to above, can be accessed at
https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force

House of Lords Written Answer

Faith Schools: Admissions

Baroness Whitaker (Labour) [HL4494] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the findings from their consultation on lifting the cap on faith-based admissions in religious free schools; and the possible socio-economic impacts of lifting the cap.

Baroness Barran: The consultation was launched on 1 May 2024 and will run for seven weeks, closing on 20 June 2024.

The department will then carefully consider all responses to the consultation and use them to inform the department's recommendations for better meeting the policy objectives of faith schools.

The government's response will be published on the GOV.UK website within 12 weeks following closure of the consultation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-08/hl4494>

The consultation referred to above can be read at

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

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Secretary of State's speech on Antisemitism

Since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th last year we have seen a shadow spread. Across the world. And here in the UK.

October 7th was the largest pogrom perpetrated against the Jews since the Holocaust. The perpetrators of those killings have said that if they could, they would kill many, many more. And yet within hours of news of the massacre being broadcast worldwide, and long before Israel had launched its current military operation inside Gaza, there was growing evidence of a remarkable phenomenon. Not sympathy and solidarity with the Jewish people as they faced another enemy bent on their extermination. No. Quite the opposite. A questioning of the facts. A blaming of the victims. A campaign of hate directed not just against the Jewish state but Jewish people everywhere. ...

Since then, the shadow has only spread. The hate grown. We have seen an explosion in antisemitism. The charity charged with recording antisemitic incidents - the Community Security Trust - recorded 4,103 incidents in 2023 — as we've heard an increase of 147% on the previous year, which was itself a record high. Of those figures 2,699 incidents occurred after October 7th. That is more antisemitic incidents occurred between October 7th and December 31st, 2023, than in any previous twelve-month period.

And every day brings fresh examples.

The chaplain driven off campus at Leeds University because he was Jewish. The visitor to a mosque promoting inter-faith dialogue told he was not welcome because he was Jewish.

The family who found their baby's passport defaced because they were Jewish.

The stand-up comic who was told - by a BBC comedy star - that she would be killed, and her family would be grieving for her in the cemetery - because she was Jewish. The renovator of a dilapidated building threatened with a machete and told he should leave the "Jew building" he was working in - because he was Jewish. The reporter told not to cover an event because her eyes looked Jewish.

And inseparable from these incidents are the increasingly strident, visible and lurid, demonstrations of antisemitism on our streets during protest marches. Swastikas, Hamas banners, depictions of Jews as exploiters, devils, child killers pigs. It's incessant. We saw it again only this weekend. The imagery of Der Sturmer paraded past the gates of Downing Street.

Now, of course, I know that many of those on these marches are compassionate people - driven by a desire for peace and an end to suffering. But they are side by side with those who are promoting hate.

The organisers of these marches could do everything in their power to stop that. Many - the majority - don't.

And we now know that it is - genuinely - dangerous for people to be openly, clearly, proudly, Jewish near these marches. At a time when we are all encouraged to be our whole authentic selves, to celebrate our identity, to be out and proud - there is only one group told they - and they alone - can only be tolerated on terms set by others - Jews.

The organisers of the marches say that there are Jewish people on their demonstrations. But they are only safe if they deny what is dear to so many Jewish people - the safety of people in Israel. If they are to be accepted on these marches then they must knuckle under, accept the calls to globalise the intifada or end the Zionist entity.

They have to obey the rules laid down by others - those march organisers. Who reserve the right to tell Jews both where they should live in the world and how they should live on our streets.

It is a classic antisemitic trope to set the terms on which Jews will be accepted. Safe, provided they live in their ghetto. Safe, provided they don't get above themselves. Safe, provided they don't contemplate the use of force in self-defence.

Until, of course, they aren't safe anymore. ...

We have seen where the unchecked growth of antisemitism has led in the past. We all know that what starts with the Jews never ends with the Jews. ...

So when Jewish people are under threat, all our freedoms are threatened. The safety of the Jewish community is the canary in the mine. ...

Antisemitism. It is the common currency of hate. It is at the dark heart of their world view. Whether Islamist. Far Right. Or Hard Left.

In the past we have tended to bracket Islamists, the Far right and the extreme Left as different causes for concern.

And indeed, it is vitally important in dealing with extremism to be precise in the use of data and definitions. But increasingly we find that those undermining our democracy and society from different points on the extremist compass are all drawn, magnetically, to converge on antisemitic tropes, language, ideas and agitation.

So far right figures - like Nick Griffin, formerly of the BNP, Mark Collett of an organisation called Patriotic Alternative, Jayda Fransen of Britain First, and Jim Dowson, a transatlantic hate preacher - have been invited to share space with Islamist advocates and broadcast from Islamist platforms, where the common focus of concern is Jewish influence, the Jewish state, the Jewish threat.

And on the extreme Left, academics such as Professor David Miller and groups such as the Socialist Workers' Party, the Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party jostle to share platforms with Islamist groupings, deploy aggressive language about "Zionists", support calls for intifada and praising the resistance - a synonym for Hamas - in terms that Jewish students say cause them physical fear.

And extreme Islamist groups then weaponise this growing antisemitism to divide Muslim from Muslim. Islamists have demanded that mosques become no-go zones for “Zionists”, that inter-faith dialogue exclude any Jewish voice sympathetic to Israel’s existence, and that believers show that they are truly faithful by demonstrating their commitment in the fight against Israel. By making ardour against Israel and hostility to Jewish voices the litmus test of how good a Muslim you are, Islamists polarise and divide our Muslim communities. That is why none of us can afford to be indifferent to the increasing prevalence of antisemitism in our society. There is a reason television series about the 1930s are called “A Lesson from History”.

A growth in antisemitism is both a precursor of greater hate and an enabler of further extremism.

Antisemitic tropes which encourage people to think criticism of Israel is muted or censored by Jewish control of the media feed into greater distrust of the “MSM”. That leads to a greater willingness to believe in conspiracy theories and a stronger propensity to seek out “alternative” truth tellers - whether on incel message boards, anti-vax YouTube channels, far-right Telegram groups or Islamist podcasts. And thus, The common ground on which our democracy depends is eroded. ...

So understanding, and countering, the rise in antisemitism all around us is central to the wider struggle against extremism, division and hate and the defence of democracy, freedom and civilisation. ...

Antisemitism, as the late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks pointed out, is a virus that evolves. In medieval times it was a religious prejudice - requiring conversion on the part of Jewish individuals to eliminate the Jewish faith. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the focus changed - the perverted notions of “racial science” and ethnic purity led the Nazis and their collaborators to wish to end Jewish lives in order to eliminate the Jewish people.

And antisemitism now is increasingly focussed on the Jewish home - on Israel. ...

So now the focus is on the delegitimization and demonization of the state of Israel, as a prelude to its dismantlement and destruction. That is what the cry of “From the River to the Sea” envisages. The erasure of the Jewish people’s home. Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem to become Judenfrei.

These protests may ostensibly be presented as against Israel’s actions in Gaza but in reality they are directed against Israel’s continued existence. Israel is denounced as an apartheid state conducting a genocide. The worst evils of the last 100 years are, apartheid, genocide, are situated in one country - the Zionist construct - the Jewish home.

The calls for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions from protestors are endorsements of a campaign - the BDS campaign - which I can see is explicitly antisemitic. ... The end point is clear - the elimination of Israel.

Being clear about what the BDS campaign wants is very far from giving the Israeli government, any Israeli government, a free pass. It is, of course, legitimate, and sometimes necessary to criticise the conduct of Israel’s government. That is why we have continually, since October 7th, stressed the need for aid to flow freely to civilians in Gaza, we have worked for diplomatic progress towards peace, emphasised that there will have to be, ultimately, a two-state solution and argued that military action must be governed by international humanitarian law.

But while it is necessary to be clear about where we may differ from the Israeli government at any point ... it is even more necessary to be clear about what is going on more broadly. We must draw attention to the way in which Israel, unique among nations, is so consistently treated differently from others. To consider why. And to see what the impact of that is on the Jewish community in Britain.

There are no BDS campaigns directed against Bashar Assad’s Syria, the regime guilty of killing more Muslims in living memory than any other. There are no student encampments urging university administrators to cut all ties with China given what is happening in Xinjiang or Hong Kong, or what happened in Tibet. I know of no efforts to organise

marchers in their thousands to demand immediate action to stop the persecution of the Rohingya or Karen people by Myanmar's Government. I may have missed it, but agitation to end the war in Sudan, or in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Mali or Ethiopia does not seem to energise our campuses.

And nowhere is there any suggestion, other than with Israel, that the errors or even crimes of a country's leaders should necessitate the end of that country's independent existence. No one argues that the state of Syria is illegitimate, or Myanmar should be dismantled or deconstructed. ...

We should all remember what those who have endured antisemitism at its worst have asked for when they were at last free. A safe home. ...

Those voices could not be crushed eighty years ago. But there are a growing number who want to silence that song today.

And nowhere is that campaign more visible today than on our campuses.

The encampments which have sprung up in recent weeks across universities have been alive with anti-Israel rhetoric and agitation. But more than that they have been deeply, profoundly intimidatory to Jewish students and others. Yet they have not appeared in a vacuum. They have followed years of ideological radicalisation. ...

And they know that if they can undermine support for Israel by encouraging a broader lack of self-confidence in the West's values, they have secured a signal victory. It is no mere coincidence that Iran, Russia and China are sources and spreaders of antisemitic and anti-Israel narratives. They know those intellectual currents erode our shared defences. ...

... they know that if they Undermine Israel and the other dominos will fall.

Why is delegitimizing Israel so important?

Because Israel is transparently successful because of its democratic values, not a history of exploitation.

Israel has next to no material resources. It has been surrounded by enemies since its re-creation. And those enemies sought to strangle it at birth.

It is a land of refugees and asylum seekers. Built by those fleeing persecution, not enacting it.

And Israel was itself a nation reborn after imperial subjugation — under the Ottoman Empire — which endured for hundreds of years.

So Israel in 1948 was a poor, shunned, embattled and fragile child of Empire.

And yet Israel succeeds. Why? Because of its values. A belief in courage, enterprise and endeavour. A belief in the worth of every individual's soul. A robust democracy. A market economy. A commitment to liberty.

But for a section of the extreme radical left to acknowledge that would be to admit that their ideology is wrong, decolonisation theory is refuted by facts on the ground, the real route to prosperity and progress lies through free markets and free peoples in strong liberal nation states.

So Israel's success must be delegitimised, its achievements denigrated, its example dismantled. It has to be branded as a settler state, a colonial construct, a racist endeavour. It has to be found guilty of the greatest sins of empire - apartheid and genocide. ...

If these arguments were restricted to the seminar room and the journal article that might be one thing. But as history reminds us, ideas have consequences. ...

There were actually voices in academia who described the pogrom of October 7th as de-colonisation in action.

Mahvish Ahmad, assistant professor in human rights and politics at the London School of Economics responded to the Hamas massacre by saying that decolonisation 'is not a metaphor'. And an associate professor at McMaster University in Canada, Ameil J Joseph, occupied the same intellectual terrain. 'Post-colonial, anti-colonial and decolonial are not just words you heard in your EDI [equality, diversity and inclusion] workshop', he tweeted. ...

In Leeds University earlier this month graffiti proclaimed that the faculty were funding an

“...ing genocide” and the graffiti went on, “Israel is harvesting Palestinian organs”. That is a direct invocation of one of the oldest and most vicious antisemitic tropes. The blood libel. On Bristol University the encampment posters claim that our media and politicians are lying because they are “Zionist funded”. Another antisemitic trope - the all-powerful Jewish conspiracy.

At SOAS, part of London University, there is a declaration of “full solidarity” with the Palestinian resistance – i.e., Hamas - and a proclamation that the student union is a “historically anti-Zionist space with a duty to uphold BDS”. Yet again, telling Jewish students they are not welcome unless they deny their own identity. Antisemitism re-purposed for the Instagram age.

Alongside these student demonstrations, academics on the Far Left who advance decolonisation narratives, such as David Miller, outline a programme that tells Jews in Britain what their terms of surrender should be. He calls for the end of “Zionist organisations”, a programme of “individual de-Zionisation”, and “abolishing the fact of the Zionist entity or any hope that it could ever be resurrected” as well as a “re-education programme” to deal with the “toxic effects”, in our country, of “Zionist ideas”.

How can Jewish students experience this as anything other than the most direct hostility and hate?

And how can we allow it to continue unchallenged?

We cannot.

That is why the Government is taking action.

That is why we are legislating to prevent universities from enabling antisemitism by endorsing the antisemitic BDS campaign. ...

There is much more that needs to be done. I believe universities, schools, government departments, the NHS and local government - indeed all public bodies - should sign up to a charter against antisemitism, adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism and make clear that antisemitic agitation will be met with clear disciplinary action.

We also need to ensure that the marches on our streets which have caused so much distress, indeed physical intimidation, of Jewish people are dealt with more effectively. ...

But alongside legislation in parliament and executive action by Government there is a broader duty. One for all of us.

We must not be silent.

We must not let tolerance for different views become a moral relativism that refuses to defend the democratic principles and traditions we cherish in this country.

We must say to every Jewish citizen in this country - your safety is the best guarantee of our security, your freedom to live as you choose the only way we can be certain we remain a land of liberty, your future is our future. We said Never Again. And that is a promise we will never, ever, disavow.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/secretary-of-states-speech-on-anti-semitism>

Lord Walney Review

Protecting our Democracy from Coercion

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66462426b7249a4c6e9d3687/E03131940_HC_775_Walney_Review_v02_PRINT.pdf

Scottish Government

Scotland's Census 2022 - Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion

For the first time in Scotland's Census, the majority of people said they had no religion. In

2022 51.1% of people had no religion, up from 36.7% in 2011. ...

The increase in people with no religion in Scotland coincided with a decrease in people who said they belong to the Church of Scotland. In 2022 20.4% responded 'Church of Scotland', down from 32.4% in 2011 and from 42.4% in 2001. This is a fall of 610,100 people since 2011, and over 1 million since 2001. However 'Church of Scotland' remained the largest group among those who said they had a religion.

The next largest religious groups were 'Roman Catholic' (13.3%), 'Other Christian' (5.1%) and 'Muslim' (2.2%). These groups saw smaller changes since the last census than 'Church of Scotland'. The number of people who described themselves as Roman Catholic decreased by 117,700 since 2011, whilst the number in the Other Christian category decreased by 12,000. The number of people who described themselves as Muslim increased by 43,100 over the same period. ...

Young people are more likely to say they have no religion than people in older age groups. This was true in 2001 when this question was first asked, and in each census since.

Between 2011 and 2022 we saw increases in the 'no religion' category across all age groups. In the 65+ age group the number with no religion has more than doubled since 2011 - an increase of 186,700 people (from 14.1% to 28.6%). ...

The percentage of people in Scotland with a minority ethnic background increased from 8.2% in 2011 to 12.9% in 2022. This is a larger increase than over the previous decade (from 4.5% to 8.2%). ...

Scotland's Census asked people to choose the option that best described their ethnic group or background. The majority of people in Scotland chose 'Scottish' (77.7%) or 'Other British' (9.4%) within the White category. In 2022 these groups together made up 87.1% of the population. ...

The 'Other white' category saw an increase of 56,600 people. Around three out of four people in this group had European heritage ...

The 'Mixed or multiple ethnic group' category saw an increase of 41,000 people. ...

The 'Other ethnic group' category saw an increase of 22,400 people. ...

To read the full publication see

<https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/scotland-s-census-2022-ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion/>

Data tables: Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion

<https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/media/qyubyivg/scotland-s-census-2022-ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion-chart-data.xlsx>

TOP

Holocaust

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Holocaust Memorial Bill: Government response to the Select Committee Report

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66475d69f34f9b5a56adca0b/Holocaust_Memorial_Bill_Select_Committee_Response_WEB.pdf

TOP

Israel

See also the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and

Communities' speech on Antisemitism that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and

"Warring parties must fully comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilians" that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Israel and Gaza

col 645 The Deputy Foreign Secretary (Andrew Mitchell): ... Over seven months since the horrors of 7 October, there is no end to the current conflict in sight. This Government want to bring the conflict to a sustainable end as soon as possible, but as so often with conflicts of this nature, the question is not about our desire for peace, but rather about the best means of achieving it. We continue to believe that 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 would then have to work with our international partners to turn that pause into a sustainable permanent ceasefire.

Building momentum towards a lasting peace will require a number of elements, including removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel. It was a deal of that kind that secured a pause in the fighting before Christmas—the only such pause since Hamas's horrific attack. It was that approach that the United Nations Security Council endorsed just last month, following some effective British diplomacy.

A deal with Hamas for a pause in the fighting would involve exchanging hundreds of Palestinian prisoners charged with serious acts of terrorism in return for the hostages' release. I do not underestimate how difficult that must be for the Israeli Government, but it is the best way forward that we see right now.

We continue to work closely with the United States and partners in the region to support such a deal. We do not believe that the International Criminal Court prosecutor seeking warrants will help in that regard. As we have said from the outset, we do not think that the ICC has jurisdiction in this case.

A deal as I have described offers the best prospects of reuniting more hostages with their families; the anguish for them is unbearable. I am sure that the whole House joins me in holding the family of Nadav Popplewell in our thoughts at this deeply distressing time. We are still working intensively to establish the facts after the awful video that his Hamas kidnappers released last week. The Foreign Secretary met the family last week to hear more about their ordeal at first hand. Likewise, we send our condolences to those families whose loved ones the Israeli authorities stated last week had died.

At the same time, the toll on civilians in Gaza continues to rise. Images from the strip give us some sense of what they endure: civilians piling belongings on to a cart led by a donkey, or seeking to scrape together a meal in a makeshift shelter. We have seen appalling attacks on aid convoys and UN offices by Israeli extremists, and the tragic deaths of UN and other humanitarian personnel in Gaza.

We keep in close contact with Sigrid Kaag, the UN humanitarian co-ordinator, and we condemn all attacks on aid workers and support the United Nations' call for an independent investigation. The Government of Israel have previously set out publicly their commitment to increase the flow of aid into Gaza significantly, but we need to see far more. The Prime Minister impressed the urgency of that on 30 April. In the past 10 days, the Foreign Secretary has spoken to Israeli Ministers Ron Dermer and Israel Katz. He has called on them to implement in full Israel's aid commitments. We want to see: humanitarian aid allowed to enter through all relevant crossing points, including in Rafah; critically needed goods flowing in, particularly fuel and medical supplies; effective deconfliction processes to ensure that aid can be distributed safely and effectively; critical infrastructure restored and protected; evacuations for all those eligible; concrete action to protect civilians and minimise casualties; and, as Israeli Minister Benny Gantz said over the weekend, more

planning for reconstruction and a return to Palestinian civilian governance of Gaza once the fighting has ceased.

col 646 We remain absolutely committed to getting aid into Gaza to alleviate the suffering, and we are working with a wide variety of other Governments and aid agencies to deliver aid by land, sea and air. I am delighted to confirm to the House that we have now successfully delivered British aid on to Gaza's shore using the Cyprus maritime corridor, which we and our partners—notably, the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Cyprus—made operational just last week. We have committed almost £10 million in funding. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Cardigan Bay is acting as a logistics hub for the operation.

We have now delivered more than 8,000 shelter coverage kits alongside aid from the US and UAE, with more aid to follow in the coming weeks including hygiene kits and forklift trucks. Work to develop other effective partnerships for the delivery of aid continues. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon is in Qatar today, discussing a health partnership for Palestinians so that a British medical training agency can support doctors and health practitioners treating Palestinian patients.

We know that much, much more aid is required, but that delivery by land remains the quickest and most effective option, so we continue to work closely with Oman to maximise the aid delivered via the Jordan land corridor. I pay tribute to all those aid workers, military personnel, diplomats and medical professionals who are involved in Britain's efforts to save lives and alleviate the suffering of civilians in Gaza. I confirm to the House that, last week, intense efforts by the Foreign Office led to the departure from Gaza of three British aid workers who were at risk from an outbreak of fighting.

As the fighting continues, we estimate that around 800,000 Palestinian civilians have fled from where they were seeking shelter in Rafah to other parts of the southern strip. The extent of this displacement is why we have been clear that we would not support a major Israeli military operation in Rafah, unless there was a very clear plan for how to protect people and save lives. We have not seen that plan. We and 13 of our partners, including France, Germany, Italy and Australia, set out our concerns in a detailed letter to the Israeli Government.

After more than seven months of fighting, it is becoming difficult to imagine the realisation of a lasting peace, but Britain continues to try to build momentum towards that goal. That will require not only the release of all the hostages and an end to the current fighting, but the removal of Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel; Hamas no longer being in charge in Gaza; the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the west bank and Gaza; and a political horizon for the Palestinians, providing a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. That is what we continue to strive towards: peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. ...

col 647 David Lammy (Labour): ... The conflict has now gone on for 226 days. That is 226 days of destruction; 226 days of Israeli hostages still in chains; 226 days that have led to 35,000 Palestinian deaths; and 226 days where the risk of further regional escalation worsens every day. We will keep repeating our call until it happens: there must be an immediate ceasefire ...

Labour has been opposed to an Israeli offensive in Rafah for months. The UK Government should now work with the United States to try to prevent a full-scale Rafah offensive, by being clear that they will assess UK exports and, if it goes ahead, join our American allies in suspending weapons or components that could be used in that offensive.

... I asked the Deputy Foreign Secretary to confirm whether he or the Foreign Secretary had received from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials any assessment or policy advice—not legal advice—that the threshold had already been met. He dodged the question ...

Last November in this House, the Deputy Foreign Secretary appeared to row back on Boris Johnson's shameful abandonment of the International Criminal Court when he said: "It is

not for Ministers to seek to state where the ICC has jurisdiction”.—[[Official Report, 14 November 2023; Vol. 740, c. 513.](#)]

The Prime Minister followed up in December when he said: “we are a strong and long-standing supporter of the International Criminal Court.”—[[Official Report, 6 December 2023; Vol. 742, c. 336.](#)]

But in today’s statement, the Government have backtracked, U-turning on one of the Britain’s most fundamental principles: respect for the rule of law. ...

Arrest warrants are not a conviction or a determination of guilt, but they do reflect the evidence, and the judgment of the prosecutor about the grounds for individual criminal responsibility. Labour’s position is that the ICC chief prosecutor’s decision to apply for arrest warrants is an independent matter for the Court and the prosecutor. ... Labour believes that the ICC’s independence must be upheld and respected, and that it is right that the conduct of all parties is addressed by the Court. ... Labour believes that the focus of politicians should be on achieving an immediate ceasefire, in order to end the war in Gaza, free the hostages, alleviate the humanitarian crisis and create a pathway towards a lasting political solution. ... Labour believes the UK and all parties to the Rome statute have a legal obligation to comply with orders and warrants issued by the ICC. Democracies that believe in the rule of law must submit themselves to it. ...

col 648 Labour supports the ICC as a cornerstone of the international legal system. That support applies regardless of the Court’s focus, whether it is in Ukraine, Sudan, Syria or Gaza. ... Does the Conservative party ... believe in the international rule of law or not?

Andrew Mitchell: I start by assuring the shadow Foreign Secretary that the Government’s answer to his final question is, as he would expect, yes. ...

The right hon. Gentleman starts off by saying that this is day 226 of the incarceration of the hostages, of the destruction that has taken place, and of the risks of escalation. I completely agree with what he says. He says that the diplomatic pressure must rise. I can tell him that the diplomatic pressure is intense on all counts and in all places. He says that we must work closely with the United States of America. Let me assure him that we are working intensively and closely with the United States. ...

I can tell him that we receive all sorts of advice from all sorts of places, but we do not—as is the custom and practice, as he knows well—disclose our legal advice. We are always careful to follow it meticulously ...

The right hon. Gentleman asks: is this a matter on which the International Criminal Court should act independently? My answer is that of course it is, but we do not necessarily have to stay silent on what the court is doing, and we certainly are not doing so. ... we do not think that the ICC has jurisdiction in this case. The UK has not recognised Palestine as a state, and Israel is not a state party to the Rome statute. ...

Alicia Kearns (Conservative): My condolences go to all the families who, over the last few days, have received the most devastating news—news that their loved ones have been murdered—and also to the Popplewell family, who have received heinous treatment from Hamas, including the publication of that outrageous video. Last week the Select Committee pushed the Minister for the middle east to do more to secure proof of life of those who are being held hostage, and that remains our call.

col 649 I welcome the effort on the maritime port—it is good that that is now in place—but it will be unable to function come September owing to the changes in the tide, so this is a short-term solution. Since 6 May, when the Rafah offensive started, only 40 trucks have gone through the Kerem Shalom crossing. In Rafah no fuel has gone in, no medical evacuations have taken place and aid agencies have started to suspend the sending in of their own people, which is extremely concerning. When will the Rafah crossing reopen, and will the Erez West crossing finally accept aid, not just through Jordan but also through Ramallah, because otherwise the amount of aid that is needed will simply not get in?

Andrew Mitchell: ... She made the very good point that the maritime option will continue only as long as the sea conditions are satisfactory, and that emphasises the importance of getting aid in by road ... She also pointed out that Rafah has effectively been closed for the last few weeks, and drew attention to the great difficulties that that causes. We hope very much that there will soon be a deal between Egypt and Israel to put that right.

Brendan O'Hara (SNP): We are on a very dangerous road if we believe that the rule of law is something from which a Government can pick and choose. Unlike the Government, we very much welcome the decision of the International Criminal Court to issue warrants for the arrest of the Hamas leaders Sinwar, al-Masri and Haniyeh for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed on, and subsequent to, 7 October. We have always unreservedly condemned the appalling Hamas attacks, the murders and the hostage-taking, and we repeat our call for the immediate release of the hostages.

Given the ferociously disproportionate Israeli response, which has seen 35,000 dead, 100,000 injured, tens of thousands of children orphaned, civilian infrastructure in ruins and the cutting off of food, water, electricity and medical supplies, we also welcome the ICC's filing of applications for warrants for the arrest of both the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The ICC says that it has evidence, including interviews with survivors and eyewitnesses, that shows that Israel has intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population of Gaza of what they need to survive. ...

For eight months, this Government have told us that they cannot make an assessment of breaches of international humanitarian law, but they have today—because it suits them—made an immediate assessment of the decision of the International Criminal Court, whose panel of experts consists predominantly of UK lawyers, simply because they do not agree with it. ...

col 650 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... The ICC has not done what he suggested; it has done nothing of the sort. He suggested that it had already found the answer to these allegations, but the truth is that the pre-trial chamber needs to consider the evidence, and to then reach a judgment. ...

Just because someone supports the role of the ICC, it does not mean that they have to be devoid of a view on what it is saying, and the Government are giving their view. As I said, we do not believe that seeking warrants will get the hostages out, get aid in or deliver a sustainable ceasefire, which remains the UK's priority.

Julian Lewis (Conservative): ... The terrorist attack was undoubtedly designed to provoke an overreaction by the Israelis and to polarise societies, and it has succeeded in both those aims. May I ask the Minister to encourage the House to read the ICC's statement in full? ... May I urge people with a partisan view on either side of this atrocious issue to seriously take on board what the ICC is saying about the activities of the side they support, as well as those of the side they oppose?

Dawn Butler (Labour): ... The Government have previously said that they will not endorse any military operation in Rafah because it would be against international law. The Minister has said today that that would be the case unless there was a very clear plan on how to protect people and save lives. What has changed?

Andrew Mitchell: Nothing has changed at all. We have repeatedly made it clear that we cannot support an attack on Rafah without seeing a detailed plan. ...

col 651 **Michael Ellis (Conservative):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a grotesque overreach by the ICC? Courts, too, must act within the rule of law, and the jurisdiction of a court is not for itself to judge. The statute of Rome, which set up the International Criminal Court, clearly delineated the powers of the Court. The US and the UK have both previously said that the ICC does not have jurisdiction. Under its founding charter, it can only act against a sovereign state that is a signatory. The US, Israel and dozens of other countries are not signatories, and Gaza is not a sovereign state. ... Is

it not true that the ICC is acting outwith its powers and, sadly, setting itself up as a political court?

Andrew Mitchell: I have made clear our position on the ICC. On what my right hon. and learned Friend says, many people will agree with what Benny Gantz said this morning: "Placing the leaders of a country that went into battle to protect its civilians in the same line with bloodthirsty terrorists is moral blindness".

George Howarth (Labour): ... after seven months of fighting, it is becoming difficult to imagine the realisation of a lasting peace ... Does he not agree that until Israel realises that it has to listen to its friends, in this House and around the world, and take responsibility for its own actions, our support for it will decline rapidly?

Andrew Mitchell: ... we have to lift people's eyes to what a future settlement based on a two-state solution will look like when this appalling catastrophe is over. A great deal of work is going on behind the scenes with regional partners, with great powers and through the United Nations to ensure that we can lift people's eyes and that there is a deal to be done that will, at long last, draw the poison from this terrible situation.

Andrew Percy (Conservative): Facts are important, and the facts have not changed since 7 October. It is Hamas who embed themselves in civilian areas, use civilian institutions and put their own people at risk in this conflict. It is Hamas who have committed rapes as a weapon of war. It is Hamas who are still holding innocent civilians hostage. And it is Hamas who went into Israeli communities on 7 October and butchered 1,200 people, including slicing the breasts off women and the limbs off children. On the other side, we have the democratic, liberal state of Israel with an independent judicial process and a Supreme Court that is respected internationally and that the ICC is supposed to respect. Yet there are people in here who, from day one, have done very little to call out some of the other behaviour and everything to hold Israel to a standard they do not hold others to. ...

col 652 **Andrew Mitchell:** My hon. Friend speaks with great passion and feeling on this subject, and I think he might be one of those who agree with what Benny Gantz said this morning. ... there will be large numbers of people, both in this place and outside, who will think that what Benny Gantz said made a lot of sense.

Richard Foord (Liberal Democrat): The Cyprus maritime corridor is welcome, but it risks acting as a fig leaf for the fact that there is not enough aid getting into Gaza. The Colonna report found that the Israeli authorities had yet to provide proof of their claims that UN staff in Gaza were involved in terrorist organisations. The UN Relief and Works Agency is the only serious organisation capable of supplying aid to those Palestinians in Gaza who are innocent. Why will the British Government not follow the lead of our Australian, Canadian and European allies and reinstate funding to UNRWA?

Andrew Mitchell: As far as maritime access is concerned, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the best solution has always, from the beginning of this, been access by road. That is by far the easiest, quickest and least expensive way of getting aid to desperate people. He is entirely correct about that.

In respect of the Colonna report, we are still waiting for the Office of Internal Oversight Services report from the United Nations, and I am advised that there has been good co-operation between the United Nations and the Israeli authorities on that. On UNRWA, as I have said, we are waiting for that report. The House should expect that we will be restoring funding to ensure that humanitarian support is available through that mechanism, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on the appalling events that were revealed in connection with UNRWA staff, and we must complete the process that I set out.

Richard Graham (Conservative): The Israeli war Cabinet looks divided. The chief of staff is pressing for a "day after" strategy, the Defence Minister has outlined his concerns, and the former Defence Minister and chief of staff, Benny Gantz, has asked to see the

Government's post-war plan for the Gaza strip and wants it to include six strategic goals, all of which look very similar to our own goals ...

Andrew Mitchell: I very much hope ... there will be a plan. ... there are many voices in Israel, and the fact that he quotes two such senior figures—one seeking to know the “day after” strategy, and the other wanting to see a post-war plan—underlines the response I gave a moment ago to the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Sir George Howarth). ...

col 653 **Apsana Begum (Labour):** Can the Minister explain how his Government can possibly justify continuing to support a military campaign that has involved the denial of electricity and basic services to civilians; the starving of civilians and the blocking of aid; the bombing of civilian infrastructure; the forced displacement of millions; the killing of journalists and aid workers; and the killing of civilians, including large numbers of children, on an unprecedented scale?

Andrew Mitchell: We do not support that. What we support is Israel's right of self-defence, but it must be carried out within international humanitarian law.

James Sunderland (Conservative): There is a danger that the scope and timing of the ICC's arrest warrants might somehow imply moral equivalence ... What does the Minister think will be the impact of those warrants?

Andrew Mitchell: ... This smacks of an unworthy, indeed ludicrous, sense of moral equivalence between a murderous, proscribed terrorist organisation and the democratically elected Government of Israel, who are seeking to protect their citizens and recover their 124 remaining hostages.

Florence Eshalomi (Labour Co-op): When we talk about the role of the ICC, it is not about whether it is moral but about making sure that a democratic state falls within the rule of international law. An estimated 35,000 people have been killed and 132 hostages are still being held. The Arab League has now called for an immediate ceasefire and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in the west bank until a two-state solution is negotiated. Will the Deputy Foreign Secretary answer the question ... on the offensive in Rafah? Will we join our American allies in responding to that by stopping the sale of all war components?

Andrew Mitchell: That is not what the American Government have done. They suspended one shipment, but they have not stopped any other supply. ...

Tobias Ellwood (Conservative): The Deputy Foreign Secretary speaks about a ceasefire, getting the hostages out, getting the aid in and resuming the talks, but will he address the bigger picture? Behind Hezbollah, the Houthis and Hamas sits Iran, which is arming and training these extremist non-state actors. As much as we debate the possible long-term governance and security solutions for Gaza, they are unlikely to stand the test of time until the challenge of Iran's disruptive proxy influence across the middle east is challenged.

Iran's destabilising foreign policy is determined by the President, the Supreme Leader and the Foreign Minister, two of whom were killed in a helicopter crash at the weekend. It is clearly for Iran to determine who replaces them, but will we advance our own robust policy in standing up to Iran's proxy influence? Otherwise, we will never secure lasting peace in Gaza.

col 654 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... the former Chairman of the Defence Committee is right about the malign influence of Iran through its proxies—Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis—on the situation in the middle east. We hope that Iran will cease to disrupt in the way that it does through its proxies. It may well be that the events of the weekend offer an opportunity for a reset.

Justin Madders (Labour): As I understand the Government's position on the International Criminal Court, it is because Israel was not a signatory to the original treaty and because Palestine is not a sovereign state that the Government do not believe that the ICC has jurisdiction. That leads us to a place where anyone can opt out of the jurisdiction of the

International Criminal Court at any time. That is a terrible place for the Government and for us as a country to be. If the Minister does not agree with that, will he at least agree that the letter from the 12 United States Senators to the ICC, where they said, "Target Israel and we will target you" and that they would ensure that "all American support for the ICC" is withdrawn, is not a place that this Government will ever be in?

Andrew Mitchell: Of course, the Americans are not a member of the Court, whereas the United Kingdom is. The point the hon. Gentleman makes is an important one because, in this debate about these terrible events and the appalling consequences resulting from them, it is important that everyone chooses their language with care.

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): The Deputy Foreign Secretary rightly draws attention to the false moral equivalence inherent in the ICC's statement between the actions of sovereign, democratic Israel and the most brutal activities of a terrorist organisation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such false moral equivalence is always drawn by the enemies of Israel as a way to delegitimise the Jewish state? Does he share my concern with this move by the ICC not just because of the succour it gives terrorist groups elsewhere around the world, but because of the risks within it for ourselves and our troops as they go about defending our interests around the world?

Andrew Mitchell: ... It is important that that message is not sent. That is why I repeated what Benny Gantz said and why I said ... that I think the sense of moral equivalence is repugnant.

Chi Onwurah (Labour): On 5 April, the Foreign Secretary called for an independent inquiry into Israel's killing of seven aid workers, including three Britons. ... It is clear that here, as in other areas, the Government are backtracking on the limited assurances given, despite investigations by the BBC, among others, showing that IDF misconduct continues, despite pledges and commitments to the contrary from Israel. ...

col 655 **Andrew Mitchell:** ... we expect a detailed independent investigation. Israel has taken a number of steps. She will have seen the acts that were taken against those who were responsible for the decisions made in those attacks, and she will be pleased to know that we are considering, with our allies, the best way to inject further independence into that investigation.

Mark Logan (Conservative): My constituents in Bolton are livid today, because they have seen through the International Criminal Court that there is evidence that "acts were committed...to use starvation as a method of war", along with violence; evidence of the collective punishment of the civilian population of Gaza; and evidence that "Israel has intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population in all parts of Gaza of objects indispensable to human survival." Never mind being on the right side of history; will we ensure that we are on the right side of the present?

Andrew Mitchell: The fact that the prosecutor has applied for arrest warrants to be issued does not directly impact UK licensing decisions ...

Helen Hayes (Labour): In the face of disgraceful attacks on aid trucks at the Gaza border, the Israeli Security Minister is reported to have said that he believes it is not protesters who should be stopping the trucks, because "it's the cabinet that should be stopping the trucks." That view cannot be allowed to stand. Will the British Government sanction the violent protesters who are destroying aid, and their supporters within the Israeli Government?

Andrew Mitchell: As the hon. Lady will know, we have not been shy about sanctioning some of the settlers who have been involved. ...

Tom Hunt (Conservative): ... What I find disturbing is the ICC report talking about an almost exact equivalence between the leaders of Hamas, who carried out the most disgusting, brutal and deliberately targeted attacks on 7 October, and the leaders of—not a few rogue elements within—Israel. Does the Minister agree that it is important to have solid, accurate data? We keep hearing data from the Hamas-led health authority, but over

the weekend we have had very different data. ...

col 656 Andrew Mitchell: ... He will have seen, as I have, comments over the weekend about the accuracy of figures, particularly the very great likelihood that figures about women and children who have died during the conflict are not accurate at all. His point about moral equivalence, which has been made during the statement, is one that will be widely shared ...

Chris Law (SNP): The International Criminal Court—the highest criminal court in the world—has applied for arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu and his Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, for the war crimes of murder and the deliberate targeting of civilians, crimes against humanity, and deliberate starvation as a weapon of war against the people of Gaza. It is unequivocal. Do the UK Government accept that they must now do three key things: first, they must reconsider their unequivocal support of Israel by immediately suspending arms sales; secondly, they must call for an immediate ceasefire; and finally, they must restore funding to UNRWA so that it can deliver emergency humanitarian aid?

Andrew Mitchell: On his first point, I simply do not think now is the time to make those decisions about what we have heard from the ICC. It would be premature. A pre-trial chamber now needs to consider the evidence and then reach a judgment ... On UNRWA, I have made very clear where we stand. ... I hope that UNRWA will be able to accept all the reforms that we are requesting ... The hon. Gentleman says that we should cease our support for Israel. We have been very clear that Israel must abide within international humanitarian law, but equally that we understand that Israel has the right of self-defence.

Henry Smith (Conservative): In March, the Foreign Affairs Committee visited a number of aid distribution centres in the Egypt-Gaza border area, and we heard accounts of how some of the aid going into Gaza would be stopped because of the potential dual use of equipment for not just humanitarian reasons but potentially, by Hamas, military and terror reasons. Will the Minister update the House on the percentage of those trucks that are now getting through to deliver that aid?

Andrew Mitchell: The number of trucks getting through is wholly inadequate. That is one reason why we have made 12 air drops ... and it is why we now have the maritime corridor. ...

col 657 Afzal Khan (Labour): New polling by YouGov shows that 73% of the British public support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and 55% support the UK suspending arms sales to Israel for the duration of the conflict. ...

Andrew Mitchell: On arms sales ... there is a proper process to be followed based on legal advice ... We all want a ceasefire, but we want a sustainable ceasefire. That is why the Government have consistently pressed ... for a pause in the fighting to get the hostages out and allow aid in. ...

Emma Hardy (Labour): How can the Minister argue that his Government respect international law when he denies the jurisdiction of the ICC in this conflict?

Andrew Mitchell: I have not denied the position of the ICC; what I said is that we are at an early stage in the process, and cannot reach those judgments at this point.

Paulette Hamilton (Labour): We must not forget that civilians and their children are the innocent victims of this war. The UN says that 800,000 people have been forced to flee Rafah since 6 May. ...

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady is correct that about 800,000 people have now left Rafah. Through the pier, we managed over the weekend to get in 8,000 shelter kits, enough for around 40,000 people, but we are part of a growing consensus that is trying to provide support. The Israeli defence force warned 400,000 people to leave. Almost double that have left, and we are doing everything that we can to support them in their new locations. ...

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): ... what military flights are taking off from Akrotiri to

Israel? Are the Israel Defence Forces using Akrotiri? Are the US forces using Akrotiri? What is the nature of the overflying of Gaza by the RAF? Is surveillance information being sent to the IDF in response to that? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... we do not comment on security information across the Floor of the House.

col 658 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Labour Co-op):** Other countries have now suspended arms sales. Other countries have restored the funding going forward to UNRWA. Why are we now leading from behind ...

Andrew Mitchell: I think I am right in saying that no country has suspended existing arms sales arrangements and agreements ... We act in accordance with legal advice and we will continue to do so. In respect of UNRWA, I have set out for the House the processes that we are going through ...

Alex Sobell (Labour Co-op): ... Mr Gantz has set out his conditions for the end of the war and a “day after”. In response, Prime Minister Netanyahu’s spokesperson said: “The conditions set by Benny Gantz are empty words whose meaning is clear: an end to the war and...establishing a Palestinian state.”

It is very clear now that Prime Minister Netanyahu wants a forever war and is opposed to a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. ...

Andrew Mitchell: What the hon. Gentleman says underlines the fact that Israel is a pluralist democratic society where there are different views. ...

Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrat): ... If the Conservative Government do not believe the ICC has jurisdiction, which international institution or legal mechanism do they intend to look to in order to ensure that any breaches of the law of war on the frontline can be prosecuted?

Andrew Mitchell: As the hon. Lady knows, we make our own judgments on international humanitarian law. ... On the subject of the ICC’s announcement today, I hope the House will accept that it is premature to respond further before the pre-trial chamber has considered the application for warrants.

col 659 **Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour):** The jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, which has today applied for arrest warrants against Prime Minister Netanyahu, the Hamas leader and others, must be respected. ...

The Israeli Government have ignored, for the past three months, the motion passed by the UK Parliament, as proposed by the Labour Party, for an immediate ceasefire and are instead planning a full-scale offensive on Rafah, which would be a humanitarian catastrophe. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... I cannot foretell what the consequences will be in respect of Israeli actions, but I can tell him the position of the British Government on an operation in Rafah: that does not respect international humanitarian law, which is why we have said that we cannot support it unless we see a detailed plan.

Debbie Abrahams (Labour): Labour believes that international law must be observed. As such, we want the sale of arms and components to be suspended, and we want the perpetrators of violence against innocent civilians, whether Israeli or Palestinian, to be held to account. ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... the Government not only believe in international humanitarian law but seek to uphold it. ...

Jeff Smith (Labour): The Deputy Foreign Secretary said earlier that “The House should expect that we will be restoring funding” to UNRWA. It sounds like the Government have made up their mind. If that decision has been made, and given the absolutely horrendous humanitarian situation in Gaza, why do we not just get on with it? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The Government operate through other agencies as well as UNRWA. We have been very close indeed to the World Food Programme, through which an enormous amount of humanitarian aid is distributed. On UNRWA, we will go through the stages that I have set out clearly to the House. ...

col 660 Joanna Cherry (SNP): On the jurisdiction of the ICC, the Government's statement is out of step not just with the prosecutor but with the impartial independent panel of experts on international law from whom he sought advice. That panel consisted largely of lawyers from this jurisdiction—by which I mean England and Wales, and not my own in Scotland. Here is what they said, and I want the Deputy Foreign Secretary to tell me what part of it is wrong:

“The Panel agrees with the Prosecutor's assessment that the ICC has jurisdiction in relation to crimes committed on the territory of Palestine, including Gaza...under article 12(2)(a) of the ICC Statute. It also agrees that the Court has jurisdiction over crimes committed by Palestinian nationals inside or outside Palestinian territory under article 12(2)(b) of the Statute. The ICC therefore has jurisdiction over Israeli, Palestinian or other nationals who committed crimes in Gaza or the West Bank. It also has jurisdiction over Palestinian nationals who committed crimes on the territory of Israel, even though Israel is not an ICC State Party.

The basis for the Court's jurisdiction is that Palestine, including Gaza, is a State for the purpose of the ICC Statute. The ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber has already ruled that the Court's jurisdiction extends to Palestine, as a State Party to the ICC Statute, on this basis.”

That is the opinion of an illustrious list of mainly English lawyers, with the exception of my dear colleague Baroness Helena Kennedy, who is of course a Scot, although she is at the English Bar. Can the Deputy Foreign Secretary, who I see has one of the Law Officers sitting beside him, tell me which part of that opinion is wrong?

Andrew Mitchell: The hon. and learned Lady ... will have read the letter signed by no fewer than 600 lawyers that broadly agrees with what she has said, but she may also have read the letter from—I think—1,000 lawyers that disagrees with it. That shows that there are many different interpretations of this matter ...

Holly Lynch (Labour): Does the Deputy Foreign Secretary not recognise the damage that is being done to the UK's standing around the world, and to the rules-based international order and international humanitarian law, by his Government's refusal to accept first the ICJ ruling and now that of the ICC? ...

Andrew Mitchell: The point we have always made is that we do not think it is helpful for the Court to intervene in that way at this point, because the main purpose is to get the hostages out and food and humanitarian resources in. ...

col 661 Chris Bryant (Labour): ... I do not think there is a single Member of this House who supports the actions of Hamas on 7 October—in fact, every single one of us has rightly condemned them. For that matter, even very long-standing friends of Israel have offered criticisms of the actions of the Israeli Government over these past few months, as have many Israelis.

Can the Deputy Foreign Secretary clarify something for me? He has suggested that 800,000 Palestinians have had to move out of Rafah in the past week or so. He has also suggested that not enough humanitarian aid is getting through, which is because the Israeli Government are refusing to let it through. He has also said that the Israeli Government have a right to defend themselves—we all agree with that—but within the bounds of international humanitarian law. Who is to judge that international humanitarian law if it is not an international court? ...

Andrew Mitchell: ... Ministers take legal advice, including on international humanitarian law, and act within it. ...

Rachel Hopkins (Labour): The Minister said earlier that the Government condemn all attacks on aid workers, and that they support the UN's call for an independent investigation into the killing of aid workers in Gaza. Is the Minister of the same view when it comes to the more than 100 journalists who have been killed during the conflict?

Andrew Mitchell: Of course. ...

Andrew Gwynne (Labour): ... It matters that the ICC thinks that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the actions of senior Hamas officials amount to war crimes; it

matters that the ICC thinks that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the operations authorised by Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Defence Minister also amount to war crimes. Given that the ICC prosecutor believes he has acted within the Rome statute and that the UK is a state party to the ICC, will the United Kingdom uphold any application in this territory if requested by the office of the prosecutor?

col 662 Andrew Mitchell: ... now is not the time to make these decisions. We need to wait for the pre-trial chamber to consider the evidence and then reach a judgment.

Jim Shannon (DUP): Any loss of innocent life is truly horrific and is to be avoided if at all possible. The latest UN reports indicate that Hamas—who are murdering terrorists, as we all know—have inflated the statistics for deaths in their areas; they have been proven to be massively overstated. What steps can be taken to ensure that we are all working with independently verified information, not propaganda, given the fact that Israel has taken greater steps than any other democracy in history to give warnings and circumvent the loss of life as far as possible in this war?

Andrew Mitchell: We do think that Israel must do more on deconfliction, but the hon. Gentleman is right that the use of Israeli lawyers in targeting and in the planning of military activity—not dissimilar from what we do in the United Kingdom—is very important. ...

Andy Slaughter (Labour): ... The Minister's dismissal of ICC procedures today confirms how far the Government have fallen from their adherence to the rule of law. Why are the Government undermining the Court and its British chief prosecutor as he attempts to call those to account for war crimes, including extermination, murder, hostage taking, starvation, targeting civilians and persecution as a crime against humanity?

Andrew Mitchell: ... the point I am making is that the House is rushing to conclusions that are not merited at this stage in the process.

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat): Whatever opinion the Minister has on the subject of jurisdiction, the arbiters on that as a point of law will be the judges of the ICC. In the event that any or all of the warrants being sought by the chief prosecutor, as announced today, are granted, can the Minister confirm that the UK Government will render any assistance necessary for their execution? ...

Andrew Mitchell: Of course. What I can confirm is that the British Government will always act in accordance with the law.

Tommy Sheppard (SNP): There is now a perception that the level of evidence the United Kingdom Government require to make a determination on whether war crimes have taken place and to act on them seems to vary with their attitude towards the country alleged to have committed those war crimes. ...

col 663 Andrew Mitchell: ... The British Government are absolutely consistent: we always act in accordance with the rule of law and will always continue to do so.

Khalid Mahmood (Labour): For the avoidance of any doubt among Government Members, I have opposed Hamas since 2007. I opposed their atrocities on 7 October and continue to do that ... I think the actions taken by the IDF need to be criticised as well, and it needs to be held to account.

The Deputy Foreign Secretary said ... that the ICC does not have jurisdiction. He said ... that the pre-trial chamber has not reached a decision. He said ... that we have to wait and that this is not the right moment. Does he believe that the ICC has jurisdiction on this issue? Will he give a straight answer—yes or no?

Andrew Mitchell: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's condemnation, over many years, of Hamas. He has repeated what I have said ... this afternoon and, if I have understood correctly, he is noting that I have been entirely consistent in all those responses.

Sarah Edwards (Labour): What steps are the Government taking with our international allies to help create the conditions needed for an immediate ceasefire that can be observed

by both sides?

col 664 Andrew Mitchell: Britain was able, through some skilful and deft diplomacy, to get everyone onside on the United Nations resolution that was recently passed, which talked about a sustainable ceasefire. ...

Hywel Williams (Plaid Cymru): Neither the USA nor China nor Russia are party to the International Criminal Court. Does the Minister therefore recognise that, as permanent members of the Security Council, the UK and France have a special responsibility to support the ICC and uphold international law?

Andrew Mitchell: ... I have been careful to be very clear about our support for the ICC, but equally to urge the House not to rush to judgment in a process that has a number of stages.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-20/debates/55D5AFDC-F855-43E8-9E74-5083F57C72B0/IsraelAndGaza>

The International Criminal Court statement in relation to arrest warrants, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state>

A transcript of the Select Committee meeting referred to above by Alicia Kearns can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14808/html/>

The Colonna report, referred to above by Richard Foord, can be read at

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

The letter referred to above by Justin Madders can be read at

<https://www.politico.com/f/?id=0000018f-4e0e-d759-a9ff-ff4ee9420000>

The letters referred to above by Andrew Mitchell can be read at

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

and

<https://www.uklfi.com/top-uk-lawyers-tell-rishi-no-obligation-to-sanction-israel>

The International Court of Justice ruling (Order) referred to above by Holly Lynch can be read at

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

The UN Resolution referred to above by Andrew Mitchell can be read at

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

House of Commons Oral Answers

UK-Israel Military Co-operation Agreement

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [902897] Whether [the Minister] plans to review the UK and Israel military co-operation agreement 2020.

The Minister for Armed Forces (Leo Docherty): An agreement for UK-Israel military co-operation was signed in December 2020. There are no current plans for the agreement to be updated, but we continually review it to ensure that it remains relevant.

Kenny MacAskill: The rector of Glasgow University, who is an eminent Palestinian surgeon, has been narrating the horrors of the requirement to operate, and even perform amputations, on children—often without morphine—in Gaza. He has also detailed the horrors of the use of white phosphorus munitions. White phosphorus ignites during surgery when exposed to the atmosphere and requires dousing, including during complicated operations. Why are we in a military pact with military forces that carry out such actions? If the Minister will not repudiate the pact entirely, will he ensure that the use of white phosphorus munitions in our name is not acceptable?

Leo Docherty: Of course it is not. We have no role in that, and we see no evidence of the prospect of that being used. We should focus on our confidence that Israel is an important ally, which means that we can make the point that the protection of civilians is of the utmost importance. We should also remember that at the heart of this conflict is the fact that if peace is to be achieved, Hamas need to lay down their arms and release the hostages.

Andrew Percy (Conservative): If a person calls for an intifada and chants genocidal chants, they are a supporter of Hamas. People can also be inadvertent supporters of Hamas, and can aid and abet them. One way in which that could happen is through having an arms embargo on Israel while Iran continues to arm Hamas, so that they can repeat the 7 October attacks, as they have said they wish to. Will the Minister confirm that the UK Government have no interest in changing their policy on defence agreements with Israel?

Leo Docherty: Indeed. We are assured that the strength of our relationship with Israel allows us to make representations about the protection of civilians, and about the increase in the flow of humanitarian aid. We do that in the context of it being an extremely important ally, while being cognisant of the broader threat from the terrorist group Hamas and Iran, which my hon. Friend mentioned.

Kevan Jones (Labour): The F-35 programme has not only given world-leading capability to our Air Force and Navy, but provided jobs and technological advancement in the UK defence industry. Could the Minister give an assurance that any review of our relationship with Israel will not jeopardise that programme?

Leo Docherty: I can give the right hon. Gentleman that absolute assurance. We are immensely proud of the F-35 project, which delivers devastatingly effective fighting power for us and our allies, and 20,000 UK jobs.

Flick Drummond (Conservative): Following on from the 2020 agreement, in November 2021, Britain and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding, elevating the UK-Israel bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership. The partnership is underpinned by extensive security and defence co-operation, but it also states that we will co-operate to improve Palestinian livelihoods and economic development. What future does my hon. Friend see for the memorandum, in the light of the war in Gaza?

Leo Docherty: My hon. Friend asks a relevant question. Our commitment to a two-state solution in which Palestinians achieve statehood is at the heart of our diplomacy and defence posture throughout the region, and it is unchanged.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-20/debates/8B8365FA-3392-45F4-BD63-E00961D804C7/UK-IsraelMilitaryCo-OperationAgreement>

The Military Co-operation Agreement referred to above is not available online.

The Memorandum of Understanding referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-israel-strategic-partnership-memorandum-of-understanding-2021/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-israel-and-the-uk-foreign-commonwealth-development-office-on-the-uk-israel-s>

Israel: UK Military Support

Andrew Bridgen (Independent): [902901] What recent assessment [the Minister] has made of the adequacy of the UK's military support for Israel.

The Minister for Armed Forces (Leo Docherty): The UK and Israel have a long-standing defence relationship, as we have discussed already this morning. Israel is a partner in the region, and a UK-Israel defence co-operation agreement was signed in December 2020.

Andrew Bridgen: ... The problem of unconditional UK military support for Israel is that while the majority of this House and of the British public rightly support our intervention to help protect Israel from missile attacks from third countries, it is a different story when it comes to its intervention and aggression in Gaza. How will His Majesty's Government's

policy aim to sort out that conundrum?

Leo Docherty: Nothing is unconditional. The point I have made this morning is that we are supporting our ally overcome a devastating terrorist attack. We do that because it is the honourable thing to do. Simultaneously, we make the point to our ally that the protection of civilian lives must be at the top of the operational agenda. Furthermore, we use our military capability to ensure that humanitarian aid can flow into Gaza as quickly as possible.

Mark Logan (Conservative): In the light of the damning International Criminal Court statement today, how concerned is the Minister about the potential impact on the UK's military relationship with Israel?

Leo Docherty: It has no bearing. We will make our judgments about the legality of our actions on our own terms, and we are confident in that legality.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-20/debates/47A28993-ABBF-4103-BD4D-A175264F7E7D/IsraelUKMilitarySupport>

The Defence Co-operation Agreement referred to above is not available online.

The International Criminal Court statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state>

Middle East: Aid Delivery

Gill Furniss (Labour) [902903] What steps [the Minister] is taking to help support the delivery of aid to the middle east.

Andrew Gwynne (Labour) [902916] What steps [the Minister] is taking to help support the delivery of aid to the middle east.

The Minister for Armed Forces (Leo Docherty): As we have discussed today, there is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support for Gaza. We—especially in the MOD—are working alongside partners and international organisations to enable the Cypriot maritime aid corridor initiative.

Gill Furniss: Over the past few months, we have seen shocking levels of suffering in Gaza. The only sustainable way in which to end this humanitarian disaster is an immediate ceasefire and the return of all hostages, but in the meantime aid must be provided to save the lives of innocent civilians. Can the Minister explain why there has been only one shipment of UK aid in more than six months, and none so far this year?

Leo Docherty: On the contrary, we have been hugely active. We have had 11 airdrops delivering more than 110 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and that is in concert with our friends in Jordan. We commend the magnificent men and women of the Royal Air Force, who have been instrumental in delivering that much-needed aid.

Andrew Gwynne: I echo the commendation that the Minister has just given our air service personnel. However, no one can be unmoved by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with scenes of children dying of hunger—it is utterly intolerable. I welcome the Government's efforts to deploy UK aid flights and airdrops into Gaza, but the mounting scale of this disaster is showing that that is simply not enough. Can the Minister explain what the Government are doing to increase the number of UK aid shipments and access to Ashdod port?

Leo Docherty: We are seeking to ensure an increased flow not just through the air but by road and sea, which is why we have been instrumental in the setting up of the humanitarian pier. We commend and thank the captain and crew of the RFA Cardigan Bay, which is providing life support for those involved in the pier's delivery. We hope that this is the first of a sequence of increased deliveries via all three routes.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-20/debates/48344983-3134-4FFB-B42A-A458B7BFFC05/MiddleEastAidDelivery>

Topical Questions: Defence

Miriam Cates (Conservative): It is of huge strategic interest to Britain and the west that Israel prevails against Hamas and their funders in Iran. The Foreign Secretary was right to state last week that ending military exports to Israel would embolden Hamas and Iran. Does my hon. Friend agree that such a move would both harm UK defence interests and disadvantage our own armed forces, who rely on Israeli-made battlefield equipment?

The Minister for Armed Forces (Leo Docherty): My hon. Friend is correct in her analysis. We are particularly focused on ensuring that our assets in the region contribute to the release of the hostages.

Peter Grant (SNP): What is the policy of His Majesty's Government on defence deals and arms sales to countries whose head of armed forces is under arrest warrant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity?

The Secretary of State for Defence (Grant Shapps): As the Minister for Armed Forces pointed out, the licensing regime is entirely independent of that. We support the country. We support the only democracy in that part of the world. We do not support the individuals in that Government; we support the country itself.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-20/debates/0C4B64AC-2C7F-410C-B72F-9801C13BA26D/TopicalQuestions#contribution-4BA7B87F-5CBF-4418-8D68-915EC61C886C>

House of Commons Written Answers

Visas: British Nationals Abroad

Jess Phillips (Labour) [26172] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of visas have been granted to the non-British dependents of (a) British Israelis and (b) British Palestinians that have been repatriated since 7 October 2023.

Tom Pursglove: The Home Office publishes data on entry clearance visas in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on visas granted, by nationality, main applicants, and dependants are published in table Vis_D02 of the [Entry clearance detailed dataset](#). Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbook. The latest data relate up to the end of 2023. Please note the published statistics do not identify how many visas were issued to dependants of people who have been repatriated since 7 October 2023.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-14/26172>

UNRWA: Security

Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op) [26463] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the security of the UNRWA headquarters in East Jerusalem.

Andrew Mitchell: The arson attack against UNRWA's headquarters in East Jerusalem was unacceptable. The perpetrators of this attack must be held to account. The UK Head of Mission, together with Heads of Mission in several partner countries, condemned the incident in a joint statement on 10 May.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-15/26463>

The statement referred to above can be read at

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/unrwa-local-statement-european-union-representative-eu-member-state-and-likeminded-heads-mission_en

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Matt Western (Labour): [25531] 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 trends in the level of humanitarian support provided in Gaza.

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.

The UK is playing a leadership role in alleviating the suffering in Gaza. We more than trebled our aid commitment last financial year, to over £100 million, 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/2024-05-09/25531>

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

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>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We urge Israel to let humanitarian aid enter Gaza through all crossings, including by reopening Rafah: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... First, it has now been over seven months since the dreadful terror attacks of 7 October. Hostages are still being held and our thoughts are with them and their families who continue to suffer without knowledge of the safety and wellbeing of their loved ones.

The situation in Gaza is desperate and the toll on civilians continues to grow. Too many Palestinian civilians have been killed and there is an urgent need to get more aid to the people of Gaza to prevent a famine.

The UK is clear that we would not support an expanded 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 an expanded operation in Rafah.

Second, we welcome the news that the Cyprus maritime aid corridor to Gaza is operational. Aid from the UK and other nations is now making its way via that route to the Gazan people. But this is not enough.

We urge Israel to let humanitarian aid enter Gaza through all crossings, including by reopening Rafah. Israel must fulfil its commitments to increase aid and guarantee deconfliction for aid convoys and other humanitarian work.

We have seen appalling attacks on aid convoys and UN offices by Israeli extremists, and the tragic deaths of UN and other humanitarian personnel in Gaza. We condemn all attacks on aid workers and support the UN's call for an independent investigation.

Finally, 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. We must then work to turn that pause into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

We must remove Hamas' capacity to launch attacks at Israel and end their control of Gaza to ensure lasting peace. We must also provide steadfast support to the new Palestinian government as they implement much-needed reforms, and in order to secure a political horizon for the Palestinian people with a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-urge-israel-to-let-humanitarian-aid-enter-gaza-through-all-crossings-including-by-reopening-rafah-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

UK and Qatar to work together on a pathway to peace in the Middle East and health and medical support for Palestinians

... The Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon visited Qatar ... to present a new partnership focused on providing healthcare services to Palestinian evacuees in Qatar.

The proposal for a UK-Qatar Health Partnership for Palestinians brings together world leading experts to provide clinical training for those professionals providing care to Palestinians as well as mental health and support to Palestinians and their families.

The first tranche of project funding by the UK will be an initial contribution of £140,000. This will fund expert-led training by the David Nott foundation, a British medical training agency, for 50 doctors and health practitioners who are treating Palestinian patients in Qatar. ...

The project will also cover a mental health needs assessment to provide a bespoke psychosocial support programme for Palestinians evacuated to Qatar.

Ahead of the visit, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for Middle East, said: As the humanitarian suffering in Gaza has reached catastrophic levels, the need for the international community to work closer to support the Palestinian people and deliver vital aid to them becomes even greater.

The partnership we are announcing today will support the doctors, nurses and other health professionals treating Palestinian evacuees in Qatar, who have suffered immense physical and mental health issues in the conflict. ...

The Minister also held talks with Qatari counterparts to discuss the ongoing conflict in Israel/Gaza, recognising Qatar's essential role in the ongoing efforts to mediate a sustainable end to the conflict. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-qatar-to-work-together-on-a-pathway-to-peace-in-the-middle-east-and-health-and-medical-support-for-palestinians>

Northern Ireland Assembly Debate

Defence Industries

1.45 Philip McGuigan (Sinn Féin): ... Sinn Féin is clear in its view that the USA and Britain must stop arming Israel, and it is also clear in its view that Invest NI government policy should not be supporting anything that ends up being used to carry out genocide. We cannot ignore Britain's track record in conflicts across the globe. In Britain's case, defence can mean intervening in conflicts or attacking nations around the world whenever and however it decides. Looking back at recent decades, let us not kid ourselves that any of these conflicts were about defending the shores of Britain. ...

3.30 Sorcha-Lucy Eastwood (Alliance): ... the ethical questions about whom the UK trades arms with are a separate but critical issue. Domestic and international law requires the UK Government to prevent the transfer of military equipment, where there is a clear risk that exports might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law or international human rights law. We are clear that the UK Government must urgently ensure that they meet those standards and should cease the transfer of military arms to Israel. ...

Sinéad McLaughlin (SDLP): ... the conflicts around the world from Gaza to Ukraine ask all of us not to explore the profits of war but to make every effort for peace, particularly in Gaza, where the unfolding genocide is a humanitarian catastrophe. The UK should

immediately stop any exports of arms to Israel, a country that is raining down terror on innocent men, women and children. That much should be obvious to anyone. ...

3.45 Gerry Carroll (People Before Profit Alliance): ... At this very moment, Britain and its imperialist allies in the US are funding Israel's genocide in Gaza. Over 35,000 are dead, there are countless injured, hospitals, schools and universities have been destroyed and millions of Palestinian people are being forced to endure famine conditions. It appears that there is no end to the number of war crimes that Israel will commit or the number of countries that it will bomb, and it does so with the backing of Western Governments. Despite all the risks and warnings of a wider regional war, Britain, the US and others continue to add fuel to the fire. They know that Israel is a bulwark against democracy and the will of the wider working-class in the Middle East, and there is no depraved depths that the ruling class will not go to to protect their interests. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024/05/20&docID=401598#4388473>

and

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2024/05/20&docID=401598#4388952>

International Criminal Court

Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine

Today I am filing applications for warrants of arrest before Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court in the Situation in the State of Palestine.

Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri (Deif), Ismail Haniyeh

On the basis of evidence collected and examined by my Office, I have reasonable grounds to believe that Yahya SINWAR (Head of the Islamic Resistance Movement (“ Hamas”) in the Gaza Strip), Mohammed Diab Ibrahim AL-MASRI, more commonly known as DEIF (Commander-in-Chief of the military wing of Hamas, known as the *Al-Qassam Brigades*), and Ismail HANIYEH (Head of Hamas Political Bureau) bear criminal responsibility for the following war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of Israel and the State of Palestine (in the Gaza strip) from at least 7 October 2023:

- Extermination as a crime against humanity, contrary to article 7(1)(b) of the Rome Statute;
- Murder as a crime against humanity, contrary to article 7(1)(a), and as a war crime, contrary to article 8(2)(c)(i);
- Taking hostages as a war crime, contrary to article 8(2)(c)(iii);
- Rape and other acts of sexual violence as crimes against humanity, contrary to article 7(1)(g), and also as war crimes pursuant to article 8(2)(e)(vi) in the context of captivity;
- Torture as a crime against humanity, contrary to article 7(1)(f), and also as a war crime, contrary to article 8(2)(c)(i), in the context of captivity;
- Other inhumane acts as a crime against humanity, contrary to article 7(l)(k), in the context of captivity;
- Cruel treatment as a war crime contrary to article 8(2)(c)(i), in the context of captivity; and
- Outrages upon personal dignity as a war crime, contrary to article 8(2)(c)(ii), in the context of captivity.

My Office submits that the war crimes alleged in these applications were committed in the context of an international armed conflict between Israel and Palestine, and a non-

international armed conflict between Israel and Hamas running in parallel. We submit that the crimes against humanity charged were part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population of Israel by Hamas and other armed groups pursuant to organisational policies. Some of these crimes, in our assessment, continue to this day. My Office submits there are reasonable grounds to believe that SINWAR, DEIF and HANIYEH are criminally responsible for the killing of hundreds of Israeli civilians in attacks perpetrated by Hamas (in particular its military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades) and other armed groups on 7 October 2023 and the taking of at least 245 hostages. As part of our investigations, my Office has interviewed victims and survivors, including former hostages and eyewitnesses from six major attack locations: Kfar Aza; Holit; the location of the Supernova Music Festival; Be'eri; Nir Oz; and Nahal Oz. The investigation also relies on evidence such as CCTV footage, authenticated audio, photo and video material, statements by Hamas members including the alleged perpetrators named above, and expert evidence.

It is the view of my Office that these individuals planned and instigated the commission of crimes on 7 October 2023, and have through their own actions, including personal visits to hostages shortly after their kidnapping, acknowledged their responsibility for those crimes. We submit that these crimes could not have been committed without their actions. They are charged both as co-perpetrators and as superiors pursuant to Articles 25 and 28 of the Rome Statute.

During my own visit to Kibbutz Be'eri and Kibbutz Kfar Aza, as well as to the site of Supernova Music Festival in Re'im, I saw the devastating scenes of these attacks and the profound impact of the unconscionable crimes charged in the applications filed today. Speaking with survivors, I heard how the love within a family, the deepest bonds between a parent and a child, were contorted to inflict unfathomable pain through calculated cruelty and extreme callousness. These acts demand accountability.

My Office also submits there are reasonable grounds to believe that hostages taken from Israel have been kept in inhumane conditions, and that some have been subject to sexual violence, including rape, while being held in captivity. We have reached that conclusion based on medical records, contemporaneous video and documentary evidence, and interviews with victims and survivors. My Office also continues to investigate reports of sexual violence committed on 7 October.

I wish to express my gratitude to the survivors, and the families of victims of the 7 October attacks, for their courage in coming forward to provide their accounts to my Office. We remain focused on further deepening our investigations of all crimes committed as part of these attacks and will continue to work with all partners to ensure that justice is delivered. I again reiterate my call for the immediate release of all hostages taken from Israel and for their safe return to their families. This is a fundamental requirement of international humanitarian law.

Benjamin Netanyahu, Yoav Gallant

On the basis of evidence collected and examined by my Office, I have reasonable grounds to believe that Benjamin NETANYAHU, the Prime Minister of Israel, and Yoav GALLANT, the Minister of Defence of Israel, bear criminal responsibility for the following war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of the State of Palestine (in the Gaza strip) from at least 8 October 2023:

- Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare as a war crime contrary to article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Statute;
- Wilfully causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or health contrary to article 8(2)(a)(iii), or cruel treatment as a war crime contrary to article 8(2)(c)(i);
- Wilful killing contrary to article 8(2)(a)(i), or Murder as a war crime contrary to article 8(2)(c)(i);
- Intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population as a war crime contrary

to articles 8(2)(b)(i), or 8(2)(e)(i);

- Extermination and/or murder contrary to articles 7(1)(b) and 7(1)(a), including in the context of deaths caused by starvation, as a crime against humanity;
- Persecution as a crime against humanity contrary to article 7(1)(h);
- Other inhumane acts as crimes against humanity contrary to article 7(1)(k).

My Office submits that the war crimes alleged in these applications were committed in the context of an international armed conflict between Israel and Palestine, and a non-international armed conflict between Israel and Hamas (together with other Palestinian Armed Groups) running in parallel. We submit that the crimes against humanity charged were committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Palestinian civilian population pursuant to State policy. These crimes, in our assessment, continue to this day.

My Office submits that the evidence we have collected, including interviews with survivors and eyewitnesses, authenticated video, photo and audio material, satellite imagery and statements from the alleged perpetrator group, shows that Israel has intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population in all parts of Gaza of objects indispensable to human survival.

This occurred through the imposition of a total siege over Gaza that involved completely closing the three border crossing points, Rafah, Kerem Shalom and Erez, from 8 October 2023 for extended periods and then by arbitrarily restricting the transfer of essential supplies – including food and medicine – through the border crossings after they were reopened. The siege also included cutting off cross-border water pipelines from Israel to Gaza – Gazans' principal source of clean water – for a prolonged period beginning 9 October 2023, and cutting off and hindering electricity supplies from at least 8 October 2023 until today. This took place alongside other attacks on civilians, including those queuing for food; obstruction of aid delivery by humanitarian agencies; and attacks on and killing of aid workers, which forced many agencies to cease or limit their operations in Gaza.

My Office submits that these acts were committed as part of a common plan to use starvation as a method of war and other acts of violence against the Gazan civilian population as a means to (i) eliminate Hamas; (ii) secure the return of the hostages which Hamas has abducted, and (iii) collectively punish the civilian population of Gaza, whom they perceived as a threat to Israel.

The effects of the use of starvation as a method of warfare, together with other attacks and collective punishment against the civilian population of Gaza are acute, visible and widely known, and have been confirmed by multiple witnesses interviewed by my Office, including local and international medical doctors. They include malnutrition, dehydration, profound suffering and an increasing number of deaths among the Palestinian population, including babies, other children, and women.

Famine is present in some areas of Gaza and is imminent in other areas. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres [warned](#) more than two months ago, “1.1 million people in Gaza are facing catastrophic hunger – the highest number of people ever recorded – anywhere, anytime” as a result of an “entirely manmade disaster”. Today, my Office seeks to charge two of those most responsible, NETANYAHU and GALLANT, both as co-perpetrators and as superiors pursuant to Articles 25 and 28 of the Rome Statute.

Israel, like all States, has a right to take action to defend its population. That right, however, does not absolve Israel or any State of its obligation to comply with international humanitarian law. Notwithstanding any military goals they may have, the means Israel chose to achieve them in Gaza – namely, intentionally causing death, starvation, great suffering, and serious injury to body or health of the civilian population – are criminal.

Since last year, in [Ramallah](#), in [Cairo](#), in [Israel](#) and in [Rafah](#), I have consistently emphasised that international humanitarian law demands that Israel take urgent action to immediately allow access to humanitarian aid in Gaza at scale. I specifically underlined

that starvation as a method of war and the denial of humanitarian relief constitute Rome Statute offences. I could not have been clearer.

As I also repeatedly underlined in my public statements, those who do not comply with the law should not complain later when my Office takes action. That day has come.

In presenting these applications for arrest warrants, my Office is acting pursuant to its mandate under the Rome Statute. On 5 February 2021, Pre-Trial Chamber I decided that the Court can exercise its criminal jurisdiction in the Situation in the State of Palestine and that the territorial scope of this jurisdiction extends to Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. This mandate is ongoing and includes the escalation of hostilities and violence since 7 October 2023. My Office also has jurisdiction over crimes committed by nationals of States Parties and by the nationals of non-States Parties on the territory of a State Party.

Today's applications are the outcome of an independent and impartial investigation by my Office. Guided by our obligation to investigate incriminating and exonerating evidence equally, my Office has worked painstakingly to separate claims from facts and to soberly present conclusions based on evidence to the Pre-Trial Chamber.

As an additional safeguard, I have also been grateful for the [advice](#) of a panel of experts in international law, an impartial group I convened to support the evidence review and legal analysis in relation to these arrest warrant applications. The Panel is composed of experts of immense standing in international humanitarian law and international criminal law ...

Today we once again underline that international law and the laws of armed conflict apply to all. No foot soldier, no commander, no civilian leader – no one – can act with impunity. Nothing can justify wilfully depriving human beings, including so many women and children, the basic necessities required for life. Nothing can justify the taking of hostages or the targeting of civilians.

The independent judges of the International Criminal Court are the sole arbiters as to whether the necessary standard for the issuance of warrants of arrest has been met. Should they grant my applications and issue the requested warrants, I will then work closely with the Registrar in all efforts to apprehend the named individuals. ...

It is critical in this moment that my Office and all parts of the Court, including its independent judges, are permitted to conduct their work with full independence and impartiality. I insist that all attempts to impede, intimidate or improperly influence the officials of this Court must cease immediately. ...

I remain deeply concerned about ongoing allegations and emerging evidence of international crimes occurring in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. Our investigation continues. My Office is advancing multiple and interconnected additional lines of inquiry, including concerning reports of sexual violence during the 7 October attacks, and in relation to the large-scale bombing that has caused and continues to cause so many civilian deaths, injuries, and suffering in Gaza. I encourage those with relevant information to contact my Office and to submit information via [OTP Link](#).

My Office will not hesitate to submit further applications for warrants of arrest if and when we consider that the threshold of a realistic prospect of conviction has been met. ...

I also wish to emphasise that the principle of complementarity, which is at the heart of the Rome Statute, will continue to be assessed by my Office as we take action in relation to the above-listed alleged crimes and alleged perpetrators and move forward with other lines of inquiry. Complementarity, however, requires a deferral to national authorities only when they engage in independent and impartial judicial processes that do not shield suspects and are not a sham. It requires thorough investigations at all levels addressing the policies and actions underlying these applications. ...

Now, more than ever, we must collectively demonstrate that international humanitarian law, the foundational baseline for human conduct during conflict, applies to all individuals and applies equally across the situations addressed by my Office and the Court. This is how we will prove, tangibly, that the lives of all human beings have equal value.

To read the full statement see

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state>

Report of the Panel of Experts in International Law

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/240520-panel-report-eng.pdf>

United Nations

Tor Wennesland UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process: Security Council Briefing On The Situation In The Middle East

... Regrettably we face yet another precipice of further catastrophe in Gaza amid stalled talks between the parties to secure the release of all hostages held in Gaza and a ceasefire to provide much needed relief to the civilian population. ...

If talks do not resume, I fear for the worst for the beleaguered and terrified civilians in Rafah, for the hostages held in unimaginable conditions for more than 225 days, and for an overstretched humanitarian operation that remains on the brink inside the Strip. ...

On 5 May, Hamas launched mortars and rockets at IDF soldiers massed on the Israeli side of Karem Abu Salem/Kerem Shalom crossing, killing four IDF soldiers and wounding ten. IDF tank shelling and a series of airstrikes in Rafah killed at least 19 Palestinians on the same day, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. The following day, the IDF said that it would operate with "extreme force" against Hamas in eastern Rafah and ordered approximately 100,000 Palestinians to immediately evacuate to what it described as an "expanded humanitarian area in Al-Mawasi." ...

Hamas has continued to fire rockets indiscriminately from Gaza towards Israel. These events have had a significant impact on humanitarian operations and access.

The so-called expanded humanitarian area in al-Mawasi lacks adequate shelter, food, water and sewage infrastructure and crossings for the entry of humanitarian goods have already been directly affected. ...

In addition, active hostilities and IDF operations continue to render nowhere safe in Gaza, including for humanitarian workers. ...

The Secretary-General, alongside numerous international partners ... have voiced serious objection to a military operation in the city of Rafah amid clear indications of its devastating consequences for the civilian population. ...

I am very concerned that the failure to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and a large-scale military operation in Rafah exacerbates the risk of escalating regional tensions. ...

... there can be no long-term solution in Gaza that is not fundamentally political.

The new Palestinian Government, with eight ministers from Gaza, represents an important opportunity to support tangible steps towards unifying Gaza and the occupied West Bank politically, economically, administratively. ...

The international community should provide support to the new Government to address its fiscal challenges, strengthen its governance capacity and prepare it to reassume its responsibilities in Gaza and, ultimately, govern the whole of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Palestinian Authority must also be an integral part of planning for Gaza's recovery and reconstruction.

The devastation and misery of the past seven months have reinforced a simple truth. Palestinians and Israelis can no longer wait to establish a viable political horizon to end the conflict and establish a two-State solution. Day after day we are witnessing the deadly consequences of inaction. Now is the time to lay the foundations for a better future for Palestinians, Israelis and the broader region. ...

To read the full briefing see

Foreign Affairs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Warring parties must fully comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilians: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... The Secretary-General's latest report on the protection of civilians presents a stark picture: a 72% increase in civilian deaths in armed conflict from 2022 to 2023; 117 million people experiencing conflict-related hunger ...

The United Kingdom is also concerned about escalating violence in El Fasher, Sudan, the deaths of civilians in Israel and Gaza, and the shocking levels of conflict-related sexual violence in the central Sahel and the DRC, among many other grave situations. ...

Firstly, warring parties must fully comply with international humanitarian law and uphold their obligations to protect civilians. They must respect the special rights, needs, and vulnerabilities of children affected by conflict. We call on states to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. ...

Second, we urge all states to take practical steps to improve international humanitarian law implementation ... Third, the protection of civilians should always be prioritised ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/warring-parties-must-fully-comply-with-international-humanitarian-law-and-protect-civilians-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Criminal Justice Bill

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

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

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

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

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

**** Holocaust Memorial Bill**

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

Amendment Paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0007/amend/holocaust_rm_cwh_0521.pdf

Government response to the Select Committee Report

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66475d69f34f9b5a56adca0b/Holocaust_Memorial_Bill_Select_Committee_Response_WEB.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>

First Reading, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-05-20/debates/97EFAAB2-0A49-440C-87EE-DA6BD49C080F/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/>

**** £20k registration threshold for charities in Northern Ireland** (closing date 11 August 2024)

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-ps20k-registration-threshold-charities-northern-ireland>

TOP