



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Israel

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UN Human Rights Council 56: UK Statement for Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's Annual Report

... We are seized with the appalling suffering in Gaza and the violations by Israeli extremist settlers in the Occupied West Bank. International Humanitarian Law must be respected, civilians must be protected, and famine prevented, by allowing lifesaving aid into Gaza. We call on all parties to agree the deal on the table in order to stop the fighting, end the suffering of the Palestinian people, and release the remaining hostages. ...

To read the full statement see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-56-uk-statement-for-interactive-dialogue-on-the-high-commissioners-annual-report>

Department for Business and Trade

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Israel

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6672d9e07d0f95cd08d0db13/israel-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-06-20.pdf>

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6672e36e31a88528d2da7e6a/occupied-palestinian-territories-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-06-20.pdf>

Welsh Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee

Welsh Government international relations: Scrutiny session with the First Minister of Wales

64 ... **Jenny Rathbone (Labour):** ... I just wanted to move on to the Israel-Gaza conflict, which has dominated our screens for the last eight months. The Senedd was one of the first Parliaments to agree to call for an immediate ceasefire, but, tragically, a sustainable ceasefire has, so far, alluded us all. If and when the UK Disasters Emergency Committee is able to launch that long-awaited appeal to relieve the suffering of civilians, can you confirm that the Welsh Government is minded to give a substantial contribution to that appeal? ...

66 **The First Minister (Vaughan Gething):** Well, I think you're right ... that is that if the Disasters Emergency Committee launch an appeal, then we would expect to contribute. I'd have to be clear about needing to understand our budget position at the time in terms of what we could deliver. But there's more than cash and some of that will depend on what reconstruction and support looks like as well, and which partners you get to work with to do that. But in a range of areas, we've provided benefits in kind that aren't always about money—sometimes it's about equipment, sometimes it's about expertise. So, I'd want to look at what we can do in a positive way. And this all comes back to when there is a period in time when we're able to do that, because at the moment, there isn't a permanent or sustainable ceasefire. We know the issues about not getting enough aid in to the humanitarian crisis that unfolds before us. And we know that there are people who are still hostages. So, all of those things are very real challenges and we see them in lots of constituencies and regions across Wales where people have direct family, community and friendship links, so I look forward to having the opportunity to help in reconstruction and support. I look forward to Wales being a positive voice in wanting peace, and a sustainable peace, for all sides.

67 **Jenny Rathbone:** So, have you had any opportunity to do any background work? Clearly, the immediate need is for the relief of famine, but, just trying to rebuild a peaceful two-state solution, have you had any detailed conversations with Cardiff University or other organisations who have this know-how to make them ready for making a contribution as soon as it is possible to do so?

68 **Vaughan Gething:** No, I personally haven't had a detailed conversation of the type that you're referring to. The lead on these when it is of course a UK Government issue—. We want to be positive and constructive in what we can do, and that's the way in which I approach these matters and the Government would approach these matters. We've engaged with the representatives of the Palestinian Authority and Andrew [Gwatkin, Welsh Government] has met people on all sides as well. We will engage with people from the Israeli Government in the UK as well. Our interest is in a sustainable peace, and I think that only comes from having two sovereign, safe and secure states that recognise it's in their interests to live side by side.

69 I think the message in that matters as well. The practical steps will still come from when I'll be able to do that, how the UK is engaging directly and how we then engage as a constructive part of that, rather than looking to design an entirely separate route. I know that's not what you're suggesting, but I want us to have a coherent approach to what we're able to do, and equally to recognise our supportive role in this, rather than acting as if I'm actually, potentially, David Lammy as the Secretary of State in the Foreign Office. We've got to think about how we do that constructively together, and that's my interest, because I know there are people directly affected by the conflict—not just us, who look at it and care about what we

see, but people with a much greater direct engagement in a way that I know is deeply, deeply distressing.

70 Jenny Rathbone: ... Wales has relations with Dubai and Doha. ... is that not a conversation that could be had? These are both countries that are not short of capital, but we may be able to make other contributions, and it's about how we can marshal that reasonably quickly once we've got a stable situation.

71 Vaughan Gething: I think needing to have an international coalition of goodwill is really important for the future, and it's also about how those relationships take place in a way that is respectful, rather than countries not from the region trying to take a leadership role in a way that may not be well received. So, I think we've got to have some sensitivity on all sides, and, actually, Dubai and Doha have been centres of actually trying to get people into conversations to mediate. Now, they of course have capital, but you've got to have the ability to invest that capital in a way in which the authorities running the territory want that to be done. Now, you have a challenge over who is actually in charge, the nature of the authority that exists, and that still comes back to what a peace will look like. So, we need to get to that point. But that's why the aid is the first thing, because you need to make sure that people are able to get through the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding, and then to get to what the long-term goal is—and I wish it was not quite so long-term—but to get to the point where there really are two safe, sovereign states living alongside each other.

72 Now, that's been the position of parties—plural—across the UK. It's the position of the Welsh Government and the UK Government, and I don't see that position changing with the general election. It's how we're going to be on the side of bringing people to that answer sooner rather than later, and recognising that we, as we sit down today, are not in control of what is happening in Gaza and we have limited influence over the Government of Israel. It's a point I've made, and in conversations I've had with Jewish communities here in Wales, that we all need to understand and recognise that the Government of the country doesn't always enjoy the undiluted support of its population, and, before the conflict, there were large demonstrations against the Government of Israel, in exactly the same way as we're going through an election in the UK, and lots of people in the UK don't see the current Government as being reflective of every view within the country. The way that we engage with the Government and with people matters, and I want us to be on the right side of getting people to do the right thing. I know that might not give you everything that you want in the answer, but I'm trying to be reflective and not to get myself in a position where the Welsh Government is no longer able to be a straight dealer in all of this, and to recognise, as I say, the very real harm that it causes to citizens of our own country. ...

79 Heledd Fychan (Plaid Cymru: ... there are Welsh citizens ... impacted by what's happening internationally here, many who have relatives caught up, in both Israel and Gaza—are you providing support to those families here in Wales? Do you see that as part of your international strategy here in Wales as well?

80 Vaughan Gething: It's not just international strategy. If you remember the questions we've had in the Chamber about some named families ... it is about how we act together, because the primary start of that help and support is actually wanting to see help and support for their family members in the middle east, and, actually, that is led by the UK Government. So, it's actually about how we work together on that, rather than saying, 'This is the international strategy.' You've got to be responsive to how citizens want to be supported. Sometimes, that is hearing the fact that we are bothered and we've noticed; sometimes, it is practical, and, in working through what is practical, you have to understand what that family or families need and want and how you work together on doing that. So, I don't think

you can wrap that up into the international strategy, but it's a part of the fact that we're an interconnected world. Sometimes, that'll affect our domestic responsibilities, and other times it will be directly about the international work we do in this or any other country.

82 Luke Fletcher (Plaid Cymru): ...one of the families that were affected by the October attacks literally lives around the corner from me, and one of the points that they raised was that there was little correspondence between themselves and Welsh Government and UK Government until, of course, they started banging the drum. So, one thing I would be really interested in just getting an understanding of is, when situations like this arise, when these international disasters happen, how does the Foreign Office give information to Welsh Government, and then, how, potentially, could then Welsh Government move that information on, where relevant, to local Members of the Senedd or otherwise so that we can all wrap around that support, as it were?

83 Vaughan Gething: ... Look, this is a relationship that is led by the UK Government, in terms of foreign affairs and consular support ... So, in the situation we're talking about, it would be consular support that would be provided for those families. So, the lead relationship is UK Government, and it would be UK Members of Parliament, of whatever shade they happen to be. It's the UK parliamentary Member who'd likely be the lead. But, actually, lots of that then quickly gets into, if there's a need to support people here, you can't see how devolved agencies wouldn't be engaged and involved. Lots of this would be local government or the third sector. So, there is a need for a practical partner, and that really is about relationships as well as structure.

84 So, with the Foreign Office, there is some sharing of information, so there are times when we find out and are told if there are Welsh citizens who are engaged and involved. It still comes back, though, to the individual awareness of who they are. Actually, to be fair, in this instance, I know that the constituency Member in the UK Parliament has that engagement with their constituency colleague here, and that's then about how they support people, and then there are all the additional relationships that exist as well, because there are people who know them from outside the constituency or the region as well.

85 The challenge, I think, always is: where does the awareness come from and then how do we something that is genuinely helpful for that person and their family? And that won't always be perfect, because the relationship will be different in different circumstances for the family and how they feel about communities, and who they'll want to have the conversation with as well. So, this isn't saying, 'The Senedd must always be engaged and involved', because that might not be what that person wants. But where, actually, there is a role for us to play, we should be willing and want to do that and want be part of the conversation, and that's the way that I want to see relationships between the Welsh Government and the Foreign Office and other agencies work. Because the longer term support will undoubtedly engage our responsibilities as well. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/13928#C600331>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

States and companies must end arms transfers to Israel immediately or risk responsibility for human rights violations: UN experts

The transfer of weapons and ammunition to Israel may constitute serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws and risk State complicity in international crimes, possibly including genocide, UN experts said today, reiterating their demand to

stop transfers immediately.

In line with recent calls from the Human Rights Council and the independent UN experts to States to cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Israel, arms manufacturers supplying Israel – including BAE Systems, Boeing, Caterpillar, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Oshkosh, Rheinmetall AG, Rolls-Royce Power Systems, RTX, and ThyssenKrupp – should also end transfers, even if they are executed under existing export licenses.

“These companies, by sending weapons, parts, components, and ammunition to Israeli forces, risk being complicit in serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian laws,” the experts said. This risk is heightened by the recent decision from the International Court of Justice ordering Israel to immediately halt its military offensive in Rafah, having recognised genocide as a plausible risk, as well as the request filed by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court seeking arrest warrants for Israeli leaders on allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. “In this context, continuing arms transfers to Israel may be seen as knowingly providing assistance for operations that contravene international human rights and international humanitarian laws and may result in profit from such assistance.”

An end to transfers must include indirect transfers through intermediary countries that could ultimately be used by Israeli forces, particularly in the ongoing attacks on Gaza. The UN experts said that arms companies must systematically and periodically conduct enhanced human rights due diligence to ensure that their products are not used in ways that violate international human rights and international humanitarian laws.

Financial institutions investing in these arms companies are also called to account. Investors such as Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung, Amundi Asset Management, Bank of America, BlackRock, Capital Group, Causeway Capital Management, Citigroup, Fidelity Management & Research, INVESCO Ltd, JP Morgan Chase, Harris Associates, Morgan Stanley, Norges Bank Investment Management, Newport Group, Raven'swing Asset Management, State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance, State Street Corporation, Union Investment Privatfonds, The Vanguard Group, Wellington and Wells Fargo & Company, are urged to take action. Failure to prevent or mitigate their business relationships with these arms manufacturers transferring arms to Israel could move from being directly linked to human rights abuses to contributing to them, with repercussions for complicity in potential atrocity crimes, the experts said.

“Arms initiate, sustain, exacerbate, and prolong armed conflicts, as well as other forms of oppression, hence the availability of arms is an essential precondition for the commission of war crimes and violations of human rights, including by private armament companies,” said the experts.

They said the ongoing Israeli military assault is characterised by indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on the civilian population and infrastructure, including through extensive use of explosive and incendiary weapons in densely populated areas, as well as in the destruction and damage of essential and life-sustaining essential civilian infrastructure, including housing and shelters, health, education, water and sanitation facilities. These attacks have resulted in more than 37,000 deaths in Gaza and 84,000 injured. Of these deaths and injuries, an estimated 70 per cent are women and children. Today, children in Gaza are the largest group of amputee children in the world due to grave injuries sustained in the war. These operations have also resulted in severe environmental and climate damages.

“The imperative for an arms embargo on Israel and for investors to take decisive action is more urgent than ever, particularly in light of states' obligations and companies' responsibilities under the Geneva Conventions, the Genocide Convention, the international human rights treaties, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,” the UN experts said.

The experts paid tribute to the sustained work of journalists who have been documenting

and reporting on the devastating impact of these weapons systems on civilians in Gaza, and human rights defenders and lawyers, among other stakeholders, who are dedicated to holding States and companies accountable for the transfer of weapons to Israel. They have also engaged with States, as well as the involved businesses and investors on these issues.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/06/states-and-companies-must-end-arms-transfers-israel-immediately-or-risk>

Human Rights Council Concludes Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Starts Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights on his Global Update

... In the discussion with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, many speakers said the Commission of Inquiry's report provided evidence of crimes against humanity, war crimes and violations of international human rights law committed by Israel. There had been deplorable attacks on schools, hospitals and cultural sites, and there was evidence of sexual violence and enforced displacement. There was deliberate targeting of women and children, even in safe zones. Speakers condemned these crimes and rejected any justification for them.

Speakers deplored the 7 October attacks against Israel by Hamas, including killings, sexual violence, kidnapping and indiscriminate rocket fire. The report showed that many of these actions amounted to war crimes. Palestinian terrorists continued to hold Israeli civilians hostage. There were calls for the unconditional release of all hostages. Many speakers called for an immediate and sustained ceasefire and called on Israel to implement the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice. ...

Some of those speaking expressed concern that religious differences were being exploited for political ends. Racist and hate speech, including the burning of the Qur'an and the targeting of churches and mosques, was highly disturbing. The rise of racism, Islamophobia and far right populist rhetoric was also a concern. ...

Independent Commission for Human Rights for the State of Palestine, said that innocent civilians in Gaza had been enduring a continuous, live-streamed "7 October" experience, multiplied thousands of times daily for over nine months due to the atrocities committed by the occupying power. Tragically, the entire world was watching without taking tangible steps to provide protection. To date, over 37,000 individuals had been killed, over 70 per cent of whom were children and women. Additionally, more than 82,627 people had sustained injuries. Approximately 10,000 individuals were forcibly disappeared, most of whom were presumed to be trapped under the rubble of destroyed buildings. Over 2 million people had been forced to abandon their homes. The infrastructure of Gaza had been systematically dismantled.

This widespread devastation aligned with article II of the Genocide Convention, which defined genocidal acts as those intended to destroy a group. Immediate action needed be taken to protect the people in Gaza. Half of the population, more than one million people, were expected to face death and starvation by the middle of July. This dire prediction underscored the urgent need for swift and decisive intervention. The Commission emphasised the report's recommendation on the necessity of invoking Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter to end the aggression. There was an urgent need for an immediate ceasefire and the unconditional entry of humanitarian aid to save the people of Gaza.

... some speakers ... condemned the escalating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. ... Israel was using indiscriminate, disproportionate military force to collectively punish civilians. ...

The occupying power needed to stop its aggression on Gaza, some speakers said. The situation in Gaza today was tragic, one speaker said, with 1.5 million Palestinians having

been displaced. Many speakers condemned the siege of the Gaza Strip, which had cut off access to food, water, health and other rights for the Palestinian people. Hunger was being used as a weapon of war. Some speakers condemned the blockade on humanitarian aid to Gaza and called on Israel to remove it. They also expressed concern about the increased repression of civic space and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. Many called for the unconditional release of all hostages.

Over 5,000 children had been killed in the conflict, some speakers said. Israeli forces had killed over 50 Palestinian children in the West Bank. No Israeli authorities had been held accountable. Palestinian children were also being held indefinitely without trial. ...

The United States was irresponsible in supporting Israel's actions ... This support had allowed Israel to carry out crimes against humanity with impunity. ...

A number of speakers said accusations made against Israel were false. Israel had allowed the delivery of several thousands of tonnes of humanitarian aid since the start of the conflict. The Israeli military targeted only terrorist militias, not civilians. The report ignored the plight of hostages taken by Hamas and did not mention the terrorist group's tunnels. It downplayed the actions of Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups. The report unjustly vilified Israel and called upon only Israel to provide reparations. One speaker described the report as anti-Semitic, because it called the creation of Israel, a Jewish State, a "catastrophe".

Many speakers called for an immediate and sustained ceasefire ... All parties needed to respect international humanitarian law. There was a need to address impunity for all human rights violations. ...

Some speakers expressed support for a two-State solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The international community needed to exert efforts to achieve lasting peace in the region, which some speakers said could only be achieved through Palestinian self-determination. Palestinians needed States to refrain from supporting the conflict. ...

Navi Pillay, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East-Jerusalem, and in Israel, said ... There was no equivalence between the 7 October attacks and the situation in Gaza since. The Commission had tabled a detailed account of all violations occurring on 7 October. However, the sheer scale of violations occurring in Gaza made it difficult to compile data on them. ...

It was welcome that Israel had been represented in the dialogue. The speaker for Israel was the mother of a hostage and a speaker from a non-governmental organization was a cousin of a hostage. The Commission wished to speak with these people and other victims directly. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2024/06/human-rights-council-concludes-interactive-dialogue-commission-inquiry-occupied>

The report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session56/a-hrc-56-26-a-uv.docx>

The provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice, referred to above, can be read at

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

and

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240328-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

and

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240524-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

The Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

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>

Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes 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/>

Petitioning against the Holocaust Memorial Bill (closing date 17 July 2024)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8481/petitioning-against-the-holocaust-memorial-bill/>

House of Lords: Guidance on the right to be heard

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55634/documents/4871>

House of Lords: Guidance on submitting your petition

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55632/documents/4869>

£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>

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill (closing date 16 August 2024)

https://yourviews.parliament.scot/health/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-bill/consult_view/

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill: Financial Memorandum (closing date 16 August 2024)

https://yourviews.parliament.scot/finance/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland/consult_view/

Gaps in Equality Legislation [Northern Ireland] (closing date 6 September 2024)

<https://consult.nia-yourassembly.org.uk/committee-for-the-executive-office/gaps-in-equality-legislation-inquiry>

TOP

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