



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answer

Business of the House

Lauren Sullivan (Labour): ... Worryingly, last week there was an attack at the Gurdwara Nanak Darbar in my constituency of Gravesham. Thankfully, nobody was seriously hurt, but I would like to place on record my thanks to the gurdwara first responders and all the emergency services for that. Although the facts of the case are still unclear, the attack caused understandable anxiety in the local Sikh community. Would the Leader of the House consider scheduling a debate on the importance of protecting worshippers in their sacred spaces so that they may practise their faith without fear?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises a very important matter in her first question in this House, and I very much welcome her election and her attendance here this morning. These are very serious matters, and I am concerned to hear about them. She may be pleased to know that the first Home Office oral questions will take place on 29 July. If she does not get the response that she wants then, I shall certainly raise this matter for her with the Home Secretary.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-18/debates/5C0D2730-E0F6-46C9-864A-AEA0F2DB674A/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-30814D26-3D50-4CD3-9171-FEFE14F6E626>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Ayoub Khan (Labour) [29] Coroner services – That this House calls on the Government to properly fund coroner services, including non-invasive scanning equipment where post-mortems are required, with a view to reducing delays; notes that there are increasing delays in places including Birmingham in bodies being released after death; and expresses regret that this leads to extra distress for the families, especially among those whose faith dictates that burials must take place as soon as possible after the death of their loved ones.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62340>

TOP

House of Commons Debate

Debate on the Address: Foreign Affairs and Defence

col 216 **The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey):** ... This week, the Foreign Secretary went to the middle east, pursuing our push for peace and an immediate ceasefire ...

col 217 **Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour):** ... does [the Minister] agree that the level of death and destruction and the loss of innocent lives in Gaza are intolerable, and that we must work to have an immediate ceasefire, an immediate release of hostages and urgent humanitarian aid into Gaza? Will my right hon. Friend outline what His Majesty's Government are doing to bring that into effect?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is right: the scale of the conflict and, in particular, the deaths that we see in Gaza are not just intolerable, but agonising. When we think back, the terrorist attack launched on Israel in October was deeply shocking as well. I am proud that it was the Labour party that led the debate in Parliament in February, when this House agreed to push for an immediate ceasefire. I am proud of the way that we have led arguments for that ceasefire, but also of the way we worked in private in opposition—work that we are now picking up in government. My hon. Friend may not have heard me say this, but the Foreign Secretary has already been to the middle east to pursue what the Prime Minister, when he was Leader of the Opposition, declared at the end of October in a speech at Chatham House: that if we got into government, we would help lead a new push for peace. In the first fortnight, that is exactly what we have been doing.

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent): ... The conflict that is going on and the bombing in Gaza have already resulted in 40,000 deaths. Are the Government serious in pushing Israel to take part in an immediate ceasefire? Are they also prepared to suspend or stop all arms sales to Israel in order to save further lives?

The Secretary of State also made a point in his speech about the need to adhere to international law. There are international court judgments at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court; are the Government going to support those judgments and ensure that they are carried out, whatever the political consequences? They require action to be taken internationally to bring a halt to this appalling conflict. Forty thousand are already dead, and the occupation continues. Surely there must be a way forward that stops the loss of life.

John Healey: The right hon. Member ... will know that from the outset, we have argued that international humanitarian law must apply in this conflict, and must apply equally to both sides. The answer to his first question is yes: this Government are serious about pursuing an immediate ceasefire, which is why the Foreign Secretary has already been out to Israel to press that case.

col 218 On the question of arms sales to Israel, on the Foreign Secretary's first day in post, through the established system that we use, he commissioned the British Government's most up-to-date assessment of the degree to which any of our UK arms export licences may be facilitating a serious risk of a breach of international law. He has said clearly that he wants that process to be as swift and transparent as possible, and he is looking hard at exactly that issue. ... this Government are serious about a ceasefire, and about the application of international humanitarian law without fear or favour. ...

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... When it comes to the middle east, we are all aware of the influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran, and we are aware of the axis of evil of Iran, North Korea, Russia and China. We are also aware that the IRGC supplies ammunition, finance and personnel to the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and terrorist groups right across Syria. When it comes to addressing that group

and what it does across the world, can the Secretary of State today give the House an assurance that it is a priority for this Government to proscribe the IRGC and put it out of action?

John Healey: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we are looking really hard, as he and this House would expect, at the growing threats that Iran poses not just as a state, but through its proxies and its growing alliances with other hostile nations. ...

col 220 Andrew Mitchell (Conservative): ... The Israel-Gaza conflict is devastating and risks regional conflagration. ...

col 221 In relation to the middle east we want to see the conflict in Gaza come to a sustainable end as quickly as possible. Our view remains that a negotiated pause in the fighting is the best way to secure the release of the hostages, enable a significant scaling up of much-needed humanitarian aid, and help bring about the conditions that will allow for a permanent end to hostilities. That is the plan that Britain championed in New York, and which secured the consent of the international community at the UN. There is a deal on the table to achieve those goals, backed by Israel, the United States and the United Nations Security Council. The onus is now on Hamas to accept it and bring to an end the suffering of the Palestinian people and the hostages, who remain in such awful jeopardy. The Government must build on our hard work to see aid reach those in Gaza who desperately need it. The Conservative Government trebled their aid commitment in the last financial year and did everything possible to get more aid into Gaza by land, sea and air. Israel has committed to increasing the amount of aid reaching Gaza, and the Government of Israel must be held to account for delivering on their promises.

col 222 I want to signal a note of caution ... I am acutely aware of the very strong feelings that the conflict in Gaza has elicited. It is probably the most polarising foreign policy issue of our time, which has played out on the streets of our country, on our university campuses and in our politics, even forming the entire basis for some candidates in the general election, who are now with us in the House of Commons.

We must remember that this remains an incredibly complex issue. The questions and challenges around resolving the current conflict and achieving the two-state solution that we all want to see are profoundly difficult. We have a responsibility to set a sensible and respectful tone in the many debates we will continue to have, and to make clear that there is no room in our democracy for threats of violence and intimidation. We require serious solutions and long-term measured policies, not performative politics or short-term symbolic proclamations. We should certainly recognise the state of Palestine, but it must be at the right time, as part of an overall solution. To do so prematurely could send a signal that terror pays. I urge the Government to resist the siren calls of those who wish to demonise the state of Israel, and who draw a moral equivalence between the Hamas leadership and the democratically elected Government of Israel in a bid to isolate and delegitimise it.

While we are all appalled at the dreadful loss of life in Gaza, we must never forget the horror unleashed by Hamas on Israel on 7 October—the deadliest terrorist attack in Israel’s history, to which the Defence Secretary rightly referred. The Conservative party stands four-square behind Israel’s right to defend itself—but it must be in accordance with international humanitarian law. We must not lose sight of the fact that this is, at its heart, a tale of two just causes, of two peoples’ legitimate aspirations for national sovereignty, security and dignity. ...

col 227 Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat): ... It has been nearly 300 days since the horrific Hamas attack on 7 October. Since then, hostages have still not returned home. The death toll in Gaza has reached 38,000. The vast majority of the dead are women and children. There are, of course, thousands more under the rubble who are left out of the statistics. Scientists fear that the death toll will soar. A letter in the medical journal *The Lancet* predicted that if we take into account indirect casualties of war—people who die of malnutrition, a lack of medication and unsanitary living conditions—the total number of

deaths could climb as high as 186,000.

The children of Gaza have suffered the unimaginable. Alexandra Saieh, the head of humanitarian policy and advocacy at Save the Children International, said: “They are being dismembered. They have been burnt alive in tents. They have been killed due to crashing apartment building blocks. They have been also killed by preventable diseases and illnesses and denied medical assistance. Children in Gaza are just suffering horrifically.” In the first three months of this conflict alone, 1,000 children had one or both legs amputated; that meant more than 10 children lost one or both legs every single day. We need that immediate ceasefire. We needed it six months ago.

There is only one way to end the killing, to get those hostages safely home and to get that humanitarian aid in. None of that can happen until the ceasefire is achieved, but we must also understand that a ceasefire is not enough for peace. Peace is not just the absence of war. It is hope that is shared—hope for a future in which Palestinians and Israelis live in security and dignity. That is what we mean by a two-state solution. That is the real prize. I have been relieved to be a Liberal Democrat during the last few months. In all seriousness, when my family were under siege in that church in Gaza, the professional and the personal collided completely. I got the devastating news in November that I had lost a family member; my cousins texted me to tell me, and all they asked for was that ceasefire. That is what the Liberal Democrats have consistently argued for, because when it comes to foreign policy, we ground our approach in liberal principles of human rights and the international rules-based order.

col 228 Jeremy Corbyn: ... I agree with her call for an immediate ceasefire. Does she believe that we should also halt arms supplies to Israel, which are being used to bomb Gaza and make us and the United States complicit in the killing of so many people in Gaza?

Layla Moran: An approach based on the international rules-based order and humanitarian law led to our being on the right side of the argument on apartheid in South Africa, on Hong Kong, and indeed on the war in Iraq. It guides our approach now. I am pleased—delighted, even—that the Government have included reference to the all-important two-state solution in the King’s Speech, and I am very much heartened by their change in tone. But words are meaningless without concrete action. It is vital that we start to think about what we need to do the day after that ceasefire is secured, because at some point it will be—we all know that. Hamas are extremes in this debate, but so is Netanyahu. Neither wants peace. It is in neither of their interests. It is the framing of one versus the other that has proved to be so insidious in this debate.

There are plenty of voices in Israel, Palestine and beyond who are partners in peace and are actively calling for it. Protest in Israel is growing, with demonstrations held in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, clamouring for a deal to be done to bring those hostages home. They often link that to a ceasefire, and the release of Palestinian political prisoners such as Marwan Barghouti. That wider movement for peace is growing.

I want to tell the House about two friends of mine, Maoz and Magen Inon. They lost their parents on 7 October when Hamas targeted their house with a close-range missile. I have been twice to Netiv HaAsara—once before and once since—and I saw their house and their burnt out car. It was heartbreaking. But rather than turn to hatred, they chose instead to spend their whole lives talking about peace, because they do not want this to happen to anyone else’s family. There is only one way to guarantee that: peace and a shared future. In them and in all those Israeli peace activists—a growing movement—I see that shared future.

This Chamber and this Government need to understand that people like Maoz and Magen are embers in a nascent fire. They need the oxygen of political support to survive and grow. The same is true for Palestinian peace activists Hamze and Ahmed, who I recently shared a panel with—all of us children of the Nakba, but all of us willing to devote our

futures to stopping the endless taking of lives to avenge a past we no longer want to keep resurrecting over and over again. These are the voices that deserve to be amplified, and this is the kind of rhetoric that I hope we can all follow—bringing people together, not seeking to divide. I say that with some disappointment, because in the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition in response to the King’s Speech yesterday, he did not mention Palestine at all, only Israel. We cannot do that. We must understand that we cannot have security and freedom for Israel without security and freedom for Palestine. That is why the mention of the two-state solution is so vital.

col 229 Let us start with the basics: a two-state solution needs two states. That is why we must recognise the state of Palestine, along 1967 borders, immediately without preconditions. I have laid a Bill in every parliamentary Session since I was elected, and I will do so again. Some 140 countries have already taken this step, including Ireland, Spain and Norway just this May. If the UK were to join them, it would send a powerful message to the Israeli Government that we are serious about two states—something that Netanyahu has rejected. It would also send a message to the Palestinian people, who are desperate for hope that the international community—in particular the UK with our long-standing historical obligations to the region—will help them achieve that future.

Many will say—and they are right—that recognition is not enough. One of the biggest barriers to peace are the illegal Israeli settlements in the west bank. In 2024, Israel illegally seized 23.7 sq km of Palestinian land in the occupied west bank. That is more than all the land it has taken over the past 20 years combined. These settlements are illegal under international law. They exacerbate tension and they undermine the viability of that previous two-state solution. We have called for individual violent settlers who breach international law to be sanctioned. I was pleased that the then Conservative Government took some small steps and sanctioned individual settlers, but I urge the Government to go further. The Liberal Democrats have called for sanctions to include Ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, and the connected entities that provide support or enable those extremist individuals. Since 2021, we have also called for the UK to ban trade with illegal settlements, because if they are illegal under international law, we should put a firm marker in the sand. ...

... the trade of British weapons needs to be handled with great care. Our policy is not to single out Israel—that is important. Our policy is built on ensuring that no British-made arms are sold to any countries that are in potential breach of human rights law. That is why we believe that we should look at our arms export trade with Israel. Despite repeated calls, the Government never released their own legal advice on potential breaches of international law in this conflict, but given that there is a case to answer at the ICJ and the ICC, the British public deserve to know whether the Government are breaching their own arms export regime. ...

... it is vital that the UK Government give their full-throated support to the ICC and the ICJ in their investigations and judgments. The UK Government must support them and their processes and outcomes without fear or favour. ... In January, the now Foreign Secretary said that his party believed that if an arrest warrant were issued for Netanyahu, they would honour it. Since then, Karim Khan at the ICC has issued one for Hamas leaders and Netanyahu, but we understand from the media that the block by the UK, which should be removed, may have remained in place. It would be helpful for the Foreign Secretary to come to the House and explain the position. ...

col 230 It has really concerned me how people perceive a double standard between what is happening in this conflict and what is happening between Ukraine and Russia. ...

I urge the Government to go further and faster on a two-state solution. I would love to see a plan for what they mean by leading. ... we need that two-state solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in dignity and security. It is going to take much more than a change in tone to get there. It is vital to what we need to achieve peace, not just in Israel-Palestine but in the middle east and the region as a whole. ...

col 236 Alec Shelbrooke (Conservative): ... Without a shadow of a doubt, one of the most contentious issues in the previous Parliament, as well as outside and during the general election, was the war between Israel and Gaza, which has inflamed passions on all sides. I fear that the general election campaign showed that some of the militant pro-Palestinian protesters are stepping over the mark. That does not apply to all pro-Palestinian protesters—there are very different sets of people—but I am talking about the militant pro-Palestinian protesters who seek to use fear and intimidation to try to achieve their objectives.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I have not given notice to the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips) about what I am about to say, but it is not a criticism, so I hope she will accept it. ... it was one of the most horrific campaigns she had ever been through. Nobody putting themselves forward in a democracy, let alone for public service, should have to experience what not just she but several other people experienced. ... Female candidates in the election, especially Labour female candidates, had the most horrific, misogynistic abuse hurled at them over the issue of Gaza and Israel, and we have to call that out. ...

col 237 I am a strong defender and supporter of Israel. I believe that Israel has a right to exist, and a right to defend itself. I believe that a close eye must be kept on whether international humanitarian law is being broken. If it is, the people who are responsible must be brought before the courts and prosecuted.

... Layla Moran made a very powerful speech ... Her personal experiences bring value to this House, as she is able to talk about what the Israel-Gaza conflict means to her, given that her family are on the ground. Who in this House does not want to see a ceasefire? We all want to see a ceasefire, but there are two sides to the coin. It is still Hamas's objective to wipe out the state of Israel, which we have to address. We have to keep a balance. As the shadow Foreign Secretary ... said, a pogrom was launched on 7 October, and we must make absolutely sure that what happened on that day cannot happen again. This House has always pushed for a two-state solution, but it cannot be down to Israel alone to make the ceasefire happen. I will carry on defending Israel's right to defend itself and maintain its security. I will also carry on defending international law and making sure it is abided by. If it is not, I will hold people to account. But the call for a ceasefire cannot just be on one side. Hamas have to release the hostages and give up their objective of wiping out Israel, and then we may be able to move things forward. ...

col 243 Andy McDonald (Labour): ... On Gaza, I welcome the Foreign Secretary this week calling for an immediate ceasefire, for hostages to be released and for aid to reach the people of Gaza, but the question is how we will apply pressure to achieve these goals. We must have clarity in a number of areas.

First, I urge the Government to set out how they will use all the necessary levers to achieve the ceasefire, including the end of arms export licensing. Secondly, I trust that this Government can provide the House with early confirmation of the re-establishing of direct funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Thirdly, I ask the Government to clarify that they support the processes that will prosecute war crimes, and that the UK accepts the International Criminal Court jurisdiction over Israel and has no truck with the nonsensical legal argument that Israel is exempt from international law. We have seen that time and again. I do not think that anybody in this House was not shaken to the core by the vision of that young man with Down's syndrome who, having been attacked by IDF soldiers, was savaged by dogs and then bled to death. We have seen such scenes over and over, and the justification that it is okay to kill 110 people—innocent children, women and men—in the pursuit of a military target is an abomination. I hope the Foreign Secretary will quickly clarify the new Government's approach to the early recognition of the state of Palestine. We need equality and fairness to resolve this crisis, and it will not be resolved without the recognition of Palestine. ...

col 251 Imran Hussain (Labour): ... After the last Tory Government stood by as clear violations of international law were carried out, re-emphasising in the King's Speech the

Government's commitment to human rights and the rule of law is an important step. However, if we want the UK to regain its global leadership on these issues, we cannot do so without upholding our responsibilities under international law. That includes fulfilling obligations to abide by and protect the independence of the International Criminal Court, as well as supporting the International Court of Justice and upholding numerous charters, treaties, conventions and resolutions. The Government must therefore immediately drop the baseless legal challenge over the ICC's jurisdiction and the arrest warrants sought by the chief prosecutor for Benjamin Netanyahu and others, and they must reject all attempts to impede the ICC's work.

col 252 ... I recently visited the ICC in The Hague ... to meet human rights organisations and to present to the chief prosecutor's team evidence of Israeli war crimes gathered over months of meetings with witnesses and experts. What was clear was just how concerned those organisations were over the lack of UK involvement in such an important case. I again urge the Government to back the ICC's efforts to secure justice for all victims of war crimes. If the Government do not get that right—if they stray from upholding international law—it puts the whole international rules-based order at risk, and it perpetuates double standards that effectively mean one life is not always valued the same as another. The UK has an absolute duty to challenge those double standards, to make it clear that everyone is afforded the same protections and to prove that international law institutions and UN resolutions actually mean something. The Government must do that in Palestine, but also in such places as Kashmir, where they must uphold UN resolutions that sit gathering dust after more than seven decades and grant the sons and daughters of Kashmir their birthright of self-determination.

Finally, it is important that the Government declare that the UK will play its part in trying to secure long-term peace in the middle east. As a number of Members have mentioned, with such death and destruction, a few lines about trying for peace are frankly not enough. Close to 40,000 men, women and children have been killed, while countless more have been injured. Homes, schools, mosques and hospitals have been levelled and reduced to rubble. Almost 2 million Palestinians have been displaced from their homes and forced to flee for their lives. Gaza remains under siege with insufficient food, water, medicine or fuel reaching those in need. The Israeli military continue to bomb, shoot and kill Palestinian civilians in direct violation of international law. A catastrophic humanitarian nightmare is taking place in Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary may call for an immediate ceasefire, but mistrust and uncertainty means that the King's Speech should have made it an iron-clad commitment. The King's Speech should have redoubled efforts to deliver desperately needed humanitarian aid to Gaza. It should have made it clear that the sale of arms to the Israeli military will end, in line with international law. It should have made clear the UK's opposition to the collective punishment of the Palestinians and demanded an end to the siege of Gaza. Instead of just recommitting to the two-state solution, the King's Speech should have set out the immediate recognition of a viable state of Palestine. ...

col 265 **Richard Burgon (Labour):** ... I wish to raise respect for international law and the question of arms sales. ... I went to the International Criminal Court at The Hague and delivered to the team of the chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, evidence of Israeli war crimes that we had gathered through parliamentary meetings. It is so important that we uphold both the integrity and independence of the International Criminal Court and the integrity of the international rules-based order. I regret to say that I believe that the previous Government flouted international law, and I look forward to our Labour Government doing something very different. That is why I backed the amendment to end arms sales to Israel.

col 266 We have talked about the legal case, and of course there is a legal case, but it is the moral case that burns in the hearts of so many people in our country and around the world when they see the horrific scenes from Gaza of the slaughter of men, women and children. We have debated it so many times in this Chamber that we have almost got used

to it. People out there want our Government—and I hope that our Government will do this—to take a clear moral stand by, yes, calling for an immediate ceasefire and upholding international law, but also by stopping arms sales to Israel to put pressure on Netanyahu. We do not want to see arms licensed in this country going to maim and kill men, women and children in Gaza. It is completely unconscionable and it must stop, in my opinion. ...

col 274 The Minister for State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anneliese Dodds): ... As this debate has indicated, there is deep concern in our country and globally about the death and destruction in Gaza. ... Before the Foreign Secretary's first fortnight in the job was up, this priority was clear from his application to visit the region. He went to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories to progress diplomatic engagement, as we play our part in efforts towards long-term peace and security in the middle east. It is clear that the situation in Gaza is untenable and intolerable. We need a ceasefire not tomorrow or next week, but today. We need the immediate release of all hostages, unfettered and rapid access to humanitarian aid into Gaza, and action to enable British nationals and their families still trapped there to leave.

col 275 My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald) inquired about the new Government's position on UNRWA. We recognise the vital role that UNRWA plays in saving lives in Gaza, providing basic services and promoting stability in the west bank and the wider region. We are closely considering funding to UNRWA and will ensure that we keep Parliament informed.

The Foreign Secretary made the case clearly in the region for an urgent, credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution, an end to illegal Israeli settlements and rising settler violence in the west bank, and a reformed and empowered Palestinian Authority. This Government are clear that the world needs a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-18/debates/CDBB0162-2412-4B51-B97D-8C95139BB2D5/ForeignAffairsAndDefence>

The letter in The Lancet, referred to above by Layla Moran, can be read at

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)01169-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)01169-3/fulltext)

UK Parliament Early Day Motions

Andy McDonald (Labour) [33] Gaza – That this House notes the appalling situation in Gaza, where Palestinian civilians are facing death by starvation; supports an immediate bilateral ceasefire, including the release of hostages held by armed groups in Gaza, and the release of Palestinian detainees held without charge in Israel; calls on the Government to demand full humanitarian access into Gaza, including that Israel open all crossings into the Gaza strip; notes the vital importance of the life-saving work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and calls on the Government to resume full funding of what is the largest humanitarian agency operating in Gaza; further calls on the Government to ensure that all parties uphold international humanitarian law and are accountable for any violations; further notes the widespread violations of international law; calls on the Government publish the legal advice on such violations and the legal situation regarding UK arms trade with Israel; and further calls on the Government to fully uphold the independence of the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court and respect the outcome of their investigations.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62346>

Andy McDonald (Labour) [34] United Nations Relief and Works Agency – That this House calls on the Government to restore immediately full UK funding to the United

Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), but also to increase funding to address the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza; notes Israeli attempts to evict UNRWA from Jerusalem; and further calls on the Government to mount a vigorous opposition to all such moves.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/62347>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK to restart funding to UNRWA

... The Foreign Secretary has announced that the UK will lift the pause on funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the key aid delivery body operating in Gaza.

In his first statement to MPs, the Foreign Secretary outlined that the UK will release £21 million to support its lifesaving work in Gaza and the provision of basic services in the region.

This funding will go towards UNRWA's flash appeal for Gaza and the West Bank, which focuses its resources on emergency food, shelter and other support for 3 million people, as well as its wider work supporting 6 million Palestinian refugees across the region.

The Foreign Secretary said to parliament: Humanitarian aid is a moral necessity in the face of such a catastrophe and it is aid agencies who ensure UK support reaches civilians on the ground.

UNRWA is absolutely central to these efforts. No other agency can get aid into Gaza at the scale needed.

I was appalled by the allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7th October attacks. We are reassured that after Catherine Colonna's independent review, UNRWA is ensuring they meet the highest standards of neutrality and strengthening its procedures, including on vetting

UNRWA has acted. Partners like Japan, the EU and Norway have now acted. This Government will act too.

The UK's funding for UNRWA was paused in light of allegations by Israel that 12 staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel. Following an independent review by Catherine Colonna and the subsequent action plan UNRWA has provided setting out detailed management reforms, the government is confident that UNRWA is taking action to ensure it meets the highest standards of neutrality.

Today's announcement brings the UK into line with partners such as Germany, the EU, Sweden, Japan, France and other donors.

UNRWA is the main provider of humanitarian relief within Gaza, and other UN and humanitarian actors depend on UNRWA's distribution network to get aid to those who need it most. UNRWA has provided 1.15 million people facing devastating hunger in Gaza with food parcels.

The Foreign Secretary spoke with UN Secretary General Guterres last night to confirm the UK's decision to restart funding and discuss the UN's vital role in providing humanitarian assistance in Gaza.

Development Minister Anneliese Dodds will meet UNRWA Commissioner General Lazzarini today to discuss how the funding will support UNRWA's work and condemn the killing of almost 200 UNRWA workers in the conflict.

Development Minister Anneliese Dodds said: The situation in Gaza is intolerable and unacceptable and urgent action is needed to alleviate the suffering of civilians there.

UNRWA is the only agency that can deliver lifesaving humanitarian aid at the scale needed. But it can only operate effectively if it has access to the whole of Gaza and it is safe for UNRWA staff to work there.

That's why we are calling for unfettered access for humanitarian organisations alongside an immediate ceasefire, the protection of civilians, the release of all hostages and a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

The Foreign Secretary also set out in parliament today his wider plan to reach an end to the conflict in Gaza. He made clear the immediate priority is a ceasefire complied with by both sides, the release of all hostages and a surge of aid into Gaza.

The Foreign Secretary said to parliament: Britain wants to see an immediate ceasefire. The fighting must stop. The hostages must be released. Much, much more aid has got to enter Gaza.... This horror must end, now. ...

In the long-term, the Foreign Secretary outlined that the UK is focused on creating a pathway towards a two-state solution which guarantees security and stability for Israelis and Palestinians.

He made clear that any long-term solution must include a crackdown on the rise in settler violence and settlement expansion and a reformed Palestinian Authority, given the powers and resources it needs to govern effectively. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-restart-funding-to-unrwa>

The Foreign Minister's statement referred to above is not yet available online.

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

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

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Observations from Gaza by Head of UN Human Rights office for the Occupied Palestinian Territory Ajith Sunghay

Yesterday, I returned from Gaza where I spent a couple of weeks working under the broader Protection Cluster - a broad-based group comprising UN agencies, local and international non-governmental organisations with protection mandates in both the Gaza Strip and West Bank. ...

The people of Gaza are suffering immensely. It truly is desperate.

People are on the move from north to south, again, although they are making the journey knowing it is fraught with danger. I saw a motorbike and trailer loaded with personal possessions smouldering on the road. There was no body. But it was clear no one could have survived the strike. On the same road, I saw a bloodied donkey cart also laden with personal belongings. It too was abandoned. Why and who carried out these attacks is not clear.

As people move from Gaza City to Middle Gaza, I observed several humanitarian responders, including protection actors, provide urgent services to the exhausted and repeatedly traumatized population at reception centres on Al Rasheed Road and Salah Ed Deen Road. Most people moved on donkey carts and horse carts, holding white flags. Many said that they had lost everything due to Israeli bombing, including their homes. One elderly woman, who fled from Gaza City on 11 July, said her husband was detained by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) at a checkpoint on his way to Deir Al Balah. She had no idea about his fate. Several others shared similar stories.

We are also seeing the outcome of Israel's dismantling of local capacity to maintain public order and safety in Gaza. Our Office has documented alleged unlawful killings of local police and humanitarian workers, and the strangulation of supplies indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Anarchy is spreading.

The hostile environment due to the war and the breakdown in civil order also raises enormous challenges for any meaningful humanitarian response to the mammoth needs of the people. ...

Civil society groups have provided frontline protection from day one. They also stress the need for accountability for the gross human rights violations that have occurred.

One NGO mentioned that while talking about "the day after" and "rubble removal" seems

distant and futile, it gives them hope that this war will end and that there will be reconstruction of Gaza founded on the rights of the Palestinian people and an end to the occupation. Women's rights organisations shared information about sexual and gender-based violence, including in Israeli detention, but stressed that there is no space to talk about this while the war is ongoing. I heard accounts of women committing suicide due to their desperate living conditions and the terrible deterioration of mental health.

The continued attacks by Israel, the administrative rules imposed by Israel that impede the entry and delivery of daily essentials, permit rejections, hostile environment due to the war and the breakdown in civil order raises enormous challenges for any meaningful humanitarian response to the mammoth needs of the people and provide any protection. Travelling through Israel, I have seen posters all along the roads, and messages for the release of hostages still held in Gaza.

The violence must end. There must be a ceasefire, and the hostages must be released. Reconstruction of Gaza must begin. And the occupation must end, accountability must be served and the internationally agreed two-State solution must become a reality.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/07/observations-gaza-head-un-human-rights-office-occupied-palestinian-territory>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answer

Business of the House

Jim Shannon (DUP): ... I am very concerned about the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill, a private Member's Bill that Fiona Bruce, the then Member for Congleton, introduced under the last Government and that the then Prime Minister was going to bring in. Unfortunately, such was his haste for an election that the Bill was not included in the wash-up before the last Friday; in another week, it would have been law. What can we do to make sure that that private Member's Bill can be proceeded with? When the Prime Minister was in opposition, I had discussions with him about ensuring that the special envoy is in place. Will the Leader of the House discuss that in Cabinet, or should we bring forward a debate?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important matter. A number of significant pieces of legislation failed to get through wash-up after the then Prime Minister took such an illogical decision to call an early election—one that I am sure Opposition Members are living to regret—but there will be a private Members' Bills ballot in due course, which may be an opportunity to pursue the matter.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-18/debates/5C0D2730-E0F6-46C9-864A-AEA0F2DB674A/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-DCD56EB5-50AE-4FBF-86FE-A59F82E1D40B>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

**** Holocaust Memorial Bill**

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

First Reading, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-07-18/debates/B19A40F3-135F-4527-9207-08F394AF78D0/HolocaustMemorialBill>

Bill as brought from the Commons

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55951/documents/4964>

Explanatory Notes

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55950/documents/4963>

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>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** Independent review into civil unrest in Leicester 2022** (closing date 5 August 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/independent-review-into-civil-unrest-in-leicester-2022/independent-review-into-civil-unrest-in-leicester-2022>

£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>

Equality and Human Rights Commission Strategic Plan 2025-2028 (closing date
3 October 2024)

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/our-work/our-strategic-plan-consultation-2025-2028>

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