



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Gaza: Polio

Mary Kelly foy (Labour) [1799] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is providing emergency humanitarian assistance to help prevent a polio outbreak in Gaza.

Hamish Falconer: The UK is supporting humanitarian agencies including UNRWA, UNICEF and UK Med to provide essential healthcare to civilians in Gaza. This includes activities to improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) - which is important to help prevent the spread of diseases such as polio.

The UK is also supporting the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) which, since 1988, has led global efforts to reduce Polio Virus cases by more than 99 percent. In Gaza, GPEI is working with partners including WHO, UNICEF, UNWRA and local NGOs, to plan a response campaign that will integrate polio vaccination alongside other essential health and nutrition services. This will be dependent on securing safe access and a safe environment in which to conduct the campaign, through either a ceasefire or a temporary cessation of hostilities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-07-25/1799>

House of Lords Written Answers

UNRWA: Finance

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour) [HL446] To ask His Majesty's Government what conditions they have attached to the renewal of funding and support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and whether they plan to increase funding to address the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Lord Collins of Highbury: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) plays a critical role in Gaza and the wider region. The Foreign Secretary announced on 19 July that the UK will resume funding to UNRWA, releasing £21 million. Some of the UK's funding will be directed at supporting the implementation of UNRWA's management reforms, that will

implement the recommendations made by Catherine Colonna's independent report. The reforms include delivering stronger independent oversight, better detection systems, improved screening procedures and other areas.

The UK continues to play a leadership role in trying to alleviate the suffering - on 14 July, the Foreign Secretary also announced £5.5 million new funding to UK-Med to fund their life-saving medical work in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-07-29/hl446>

The announcements referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-19/debates/CEEB9B68-0D16-45BD-85E3-AA2F02F415DE/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-7C03A336-9D74-412B-AB60-6625EC6B7641>
and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire-in-gaza-on-first-visit-to-the-middle-east>

The Colonna 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

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour) [HL447] To ask His Majesty's Government how they have responded to the Israeli Knesset's decision to designate the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East as a terrorist organisation, and whether this will impact on future UK support and funding to...

Lord Collins of Highbury: The Foreign Secretary announced on 19 July that the UK will resume funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), providing £21 million. We are committed to continuing our support to UNRWA, which plays a critical role in delivering humanitarian aid in Gaza and contributing to regional stability. Some of the UK's funding will be directed at supporting the implementation of management reforms recommended by Catherine Colonna's independent review. We are deeply concerned that draft legislation is being considered by the Israeli Knesset which would designate UNRWA as a terrorist organisation and will continue to monitor developments closely.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-07-29/hl447>

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-19/debates/CEEB9B68-0D16-45BD-85E3-AA2F02F415DE/IsraelAndGaza#contribution-7C03A336-9D74-412B-AB60-6625EC6B7641>

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

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK statement: Israel's revocation of Norwegian diplomats' status

We are deeply concerned by Israel's decision to revoke the diplomatic status of 8 Norwegian diplomats dealing with the Palestinian Authority. Norway has long played a unique and valued role in supporting peace for Israelis and Palestinians. We urge Israel to reconsider.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-statement-israels-revocation-of-norwegian-diplomats-status>

David Lammy Appalled by the Israeli Military strike on al-Tabeen school and the tragic loss of life. Hamas must stop endangering civilians. Israel must comply with International Humanitarian Law. We need an immediate ceasefire to protect civilians, free all hostages, and end restrictions on aid.

<https://x.com/DavidLammy/status/1822250373110739406>

United Nations

Witness to the Nakba: A Palestinian teacher is still waiting for a solution 76 years after becoming a refugee in Lebanon

Before the summer of 1948, Mr. Al-Said's life was like any other child's in historical Palestine. Belonging to one of the poorer families in the community, he remembers working to gather olives, climbing trees, and playing in the courtyard with his friends.

His father used to ride his bicycle to work at a major supermarket chain called Spinney's in Acre. "We would run to welcome him after work, and drag the bicycle for him," he said. ...

"Our home was just one room. My mother would tell us to wait for our father to come. We would lay out fruit to eat, cactus fruit, figs, and grapes. All types of rainfed fruits grew in our land", he said.

When the war broke out, his father moved the family to his grandmother's village a few kilometres away from Al-Birwa and went back to defend his hometown. After it was clear the battle was lost, he came back for his wife and four sons and started the long journey across the Lebanese border.

Mr. Said remembers stopping at several villages along the way, sleeping the nights in olive groves. He remembers a sea of people, "as far as the eye could see" walking in line-formation. Each of his parents carried a young child and a bundle of clothes, while young Mahmoud held his brother's hand a jug of water throughout the treacherous journey.

"My father told us we would only leave for a few days and come back to Palestine. ...

After his father's passing, his uncles convinced his mother to move closer to them to the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, where they had recently sought refuge. ...

The family lived in a wooden shack by the slaughterhouse in Tripoli's port city Al-Mina. He said: "The fish would gather where they drained the blood into the sea, so we would go fishing there to get a meal sometimes." The family also received assistance from the Red Cross, until that task was taken over by the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) in 1950. ...

To help with the family expenses, Mahmoud would frequent the local dumps in search of scrap metal and collect shells from the shore by their shack to sell. ...

At 19 years old ... Mahmoud got a job at a sawmill making crates for the oranges that grew in abundance in Tripoli ...

He continued working there even during his first year of college, after which he traveled to Saudi Arabia on a teaching contract in 1965. ...

Five years later, Mr. Al-Said returned to Lebanon, where he landed a job with UNRWA as part-time teacher. In 1971, he was assigned a full-time role as an instructor ...

"I still see a lot of my first students in the street, and they always greet me warmly. Some of them became UNRWA employees themselves, and some have had children and grandchildren – many of whom I also taught. ... Teaching at UNRWA schools was a source of pride for him. He said it made him feel like he was on the frontlines supporting his community. ...

Around age 14, he developed a new hobby, collecting books, and has read over a thousand books in his lifetime. ...

Mr. Al-Said, like millions of other Palestinian refugees who are suffering a similar fate and are presently dispersed throughout Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, has been waiting for a

solution to his predicament for 76 years now.

“Leaving Al-Birwa was compulsory because every village that resisted was completely flattened. They didn’t leave a trace in it”, he explained.

“The question of Palestine refugees is unlike any other the world has seen. The uprooting of a people and replacing them with another is very difficult to accept. It doesn’t seem like there will be a solution to this issue any time soon,” he added.

Mr. Al-Said said the entire Question of Palestine has taken far too long to resolve and has “rotted”. He said he has lost hope in returning home but expressed his faith in a solution for future generations.

“When I hear the word ‘refugee’ I feel the oppression. I feel offended. I feel like this should not be happening. Why haven’t we been able to solve the plight of the Palestinian refugee after 76 years?”

He believes that the solution needs to be two states, living side by side under the protection of the United Nations, “so that they do not continue to quarrel”.

“There cannot be peace between Israelis and Palestinians except through a just solution in which the Palestinian People are given some kind of rights. The majority of Palestinians accept the two-state solution. Negotiations need to be between two victorious parties. You cannot have real negotiations between a victor and a vanquished. Both parties need to feel like they won”.

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/08/1153011>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN Human Rights Chief @volker_turk is shocked & appalled by words of Israeli Minister Smotrich for whom letting 2 million Palestinians in #Gaza starve to death could be “justified & moral” in order to free hostages. We condemn these words in the strongest terms. [plus video]

<https://x.com/UNHumanRights/status/1821865524067786801>

The remarks from Minister Smotrich referred to above can be heard (in Hebrew) starting at 1hr 32mins at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9633tuSyMOI>

The UN Human Rights Office condemns Israeli Defense Force’s Strike on Al Tabae’en School in Gaza City

The UN Human Rights Office condemns the increasing frequency of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) strikes on schools where hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced Palestinians have sought shelter, conducted with apparent disregard for the high rate of civilian fatalities.

In the latest of such strikes, at around 0430 hours this morning during dawn prayer, a mosque inside Al Tabae’en School was struck by the IDF at least three times with an initial report of at least 93 Palestinians killed, including 11 children and 6 women. The majority of fatalities appear to have been inside the mosque performing their prayers. Additionally, dozens of others were reportedly seriously injured, with the majority being children, women, and older people. ...

Despite IDF statements that all measures are taken to avoid civilian harm, the repeated strikes on IDP shelters in areas to which the populations have been forced to move, and the consistent and predictable impact on civilians, suggest a failure to strictly comply with obligations required by International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack. ...

In most of the incidents, the Israeli military asserts that the schools were used by Palestinian armed groups and that they took measures to reduce civilian harm. While the co-location by armed groups of military objectives with civilians or the use of the presence of civilians with the objective of shielding a military objective from attack constitute violations of IHL, it does not negate Israel's obligation to comply strictly with IHL, including the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution when carrying out military operations. Israel, as the occupying power, is obliged to provide the population it has forcibly displaced with basic humanitarian needs, including safe shelter.

To read the full press release see

<https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/un-human-rights-office-opt-un-human-rights-office-condemns-israeli-defense-forces-strike-al-tabaeen-school-gaza-city>

UNRWA

Philippe Lazzarini Another day of horror in #Gaza Another school hit with reports of dozens of Palestinian killed among them women, children and older people. Schools, UN facilities and civilian infrastructure are #NOTaTarget Parties to the conflict must not use schools & other civilian facilities for military or fighting purposes. Parties to the conflict must protect civilians and civilian infrastructure at all times. It's time for these horrors unfolding under our watch to end. We cannot let the unbearable become a new norm. The more recurrent, the more we lose our collective humanity. #CeasefireNOW

<https://x.com/UNLazzarini/status/1822228589309222913>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3741>

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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes today**

£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>

**** closes in 5 days**

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/

**** closes in 5 days**

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