Israel

House of Commons Oral Answers

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Paul Bristow (Conservative) [906032] What diplomatic steps [the Minister] is taking to help support the de-escalation of violence in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Imran Hussain (Labour) [906033] What recent assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Mohammad Yasin (Labour) [906034] What assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of recent violence in Israel and Palestine.

Helen Hayes (Labour) [906046] What assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of recent violence in Israel and Palestine.

Flick Drummond (Conservative) [906050] What steps [the Minister's] Department is taking to help secure peace in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Mick Whitley (Labour) [906054] What assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of recent violence in Israel and Palestine.

Richard Burgon (Labour) [906055] What assessment [the Minister] has made of the implications for his policies of recent violence in Israel and Palestine.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley): The accelerating cycle of violence in the west bank is a cause of enormous concern, and the Government are intensely focused on the situation. While the UK firmly supports Israel's right to defend itself and its citizens against terrorism, we urge the Israel Defence Forces to demonstrate restraint, adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law and ensure that civilians are protected. The UK's position on settlements is clear: settlements are illegal under international law and call into question Israel's commitment to the two-state solution.

Paul Bristow: Regrettably, a lasting peace deal seems as far away as ever. In 2023, dozens of Palestinian children have been killed in Israeli military operations. We should never become immune to the tragedy of those deaths, but will the Minister urge the Israeli Government to show compassion and restraint and urge all sides to put respect for human life first?
David Rutley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Every one of those deaths is tragic and a real tragedy. In the annual “Human Rights and Democracy Report” published by the FCDO last week, the OPTs were identified as a human rights priority. The UK will continue to oppose violations and abuse of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, including through our ongoing support for civil society actors. It is vital work.

Imran Hussain: Seven years ago in this very Chamber, I raised the case of 68-year-old Nora and her family, who faced being forced out of their home by Israeli settlers. Despite international opposition, last week she was tragically dragged from her home of more than seven decades. If this case is not it, what is the Government’s red line? How many more Palestinian grandmothers must be forcibly evicted? Will the Minister stand by the words of his own former Prime Minister and leader, David Cameron, who told me on that day seven years ago that what we are seeing in occupied East Jerusalem is now more than an expansion of illegal settlements, but an “encirclement”?

David Rutley: Demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and call into question Israel’s commitment to a viable two-state solution. In all but the most exceptional cases, demolition by an occupying power is contrary to international humanitarian law. Lord Ahmad has raised this case with the Israeli ambassador and made it clear that we urge Israel to reconsider forthcoming evictions.

Mohammad Yasin: This year has already been the deadliest for violence in the west bank since 2005. The expansion of illegal settlements keeps on growing. The UK Government now have the presidency of the UN Security Council. Will the Minister commit to supporting an International Criminal Court investigation into the killing of innocent Palestinians and suspend all arms sales to Israel until it abides by international law?

David Rutley: We are using our powers as president of the UN Security Council to convene and bring people together. We are concerned about the ongoing deterioration of the situation. We continue to monitor the situation on the ground with our international allies.

Helen Hayes: Earlier this year, I was privileged to visit healthcare facilities supported by Medical Aid for Palestinians in the west bank. This week, it has taken the unprecedented step of providing bulletproof vests and helmets to medical workers in the west bank because of an increase in the attacks they are facing. In last week’s urgent question on violence in the west bank, the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan) announced that the Minister responsible for the middle east and north Africa, Lord Ahmad, would be speaking to the Israeli ambassador to demand that access to medical care is allowed according to Israel’s obligations under international law. Can the Minister set out what assurances he has received from the Israeli authorities that violations against healthcare workers and barriers to health access in the west bank will be brought to an end?

David Rutley: Lord Ahmad did meet the Israeli official and talked through the importance of this matter. As the hon. Lady rightly highlights, international humanitarian law requires military forces to allow medical access in order to evacuate and treat the wounded. We are always urging Israel to live up to those important requirements.

Flick Drummond: This year has seen the highest number on record of settlements in the west bank. In just the first half of 2023, the Israeli Government promoted 12,855 housing units and 10 new outposts. The total number of settlers in the west bank is now 750,000. This is contrary to international law and further displaces many Palestinian families as their houses and land are taken away. How will that help the peace process? What are the Government doing to uphold international law?

David Rutley: That is an important question. As was laid out in the Foreign
Secretary’s trilateral statement with the Foreign Ministers of Australia and Canada on 30 June, the continued expansion of settlements is an obstacle to peace and negatively impacts efforts to achieve a negotiated two-state solution. We call on the Government of Israel to reverse these decisions, and we have continued to do that with the Foreign Secretary speaking to his counterpart on 5 July.

**Mick Whitley:** In the first five months of 2023, the United Nations recorded 475 instances of settler-related violence resulting in casualties or property damage, which was the highest daily average since 2006. What plans has the Minister got to request that the Israeli Authorities take action to prevent settler violence against Palestinians? As the settlements are considered to be illegal under international law, will he commit to a ban on the importation of settlement goods as has been done with goods arising from other breaches of international law?

**David Rutley:** We welcome the joint statement from the heads of the Israel Defence Force, the Israeli Security Agency and Israeli police as well as statements by other Israeli leaders that condemn these criminal acts. We call on the authorities to ensure accountability for all perpetrators of violence. It is important that words are turned into actions.

**Richard Burgon:** Back in 2016, I was part of a parliamentary delegation that visited the Sub Laban family in their home of 70 years in the occupied old city of Jerusalem. Last week, Israel forcibly evicted them to make way for illegal settlers, as has been replicated time after time across occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the west bank. How many such violations of international law by Israel will have to take place before the Government act, including by banning UK trade with illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as organisations such as Oxfam, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have called for?

**David Rutley:** As I said, we are concerned about demolitions and evictions of Palestinians, which call into question Israel’s commitment to a viable two-state solution. We are pushing for it to reconsider forthcoming evictions.

**Robert Neill (Conservative):** For those of us who are friends of Israel—and proud to be—one of its strengths has been its independent judiciary, which has on occasion struck down arbitrary action by Israeli authorities. Will the Minister say, as friends, to his Israeli counterparts when he next meets them that any proposals that might reduce the independence of the judiciary in Israel would not help Israel’s cause, would not help stability in the region and would make it harder for its friends to advocate for its cause?

**David Rutley:** I understand my hon. Friend's important point. We endorse the words of Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who is seeking a compromise. He recently said: “In the midst of a deep and worrisome crisis, the responsible act of leadership must be to sit and talk”.

**Stephen Crabb (Conservative):** What makes this latest tragic wave of violence even more concerning is the emergence of new terror groups in the Palestinian territories such as the Lions’ Den and the Jenin Brigades alongside Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, coupled with the seeming loss of control of the Palestinian Authority. Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the influence of outside actors—namely Iran—in enabling and encouraging violence in the region?

**David Rutley:** My right hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point. The actions of Iran are abhorrent and causing all sorts of challenges in regional instability, and they need to be called out.

**John Howell (Conservative):** Recently published documents reveal an ambitious peace project to establish a continuous land bridge directly connecting Israel to Jordan and other Arab states. What steps is the Foreign Office taking to support our middle east allies on this welcome peace project?

**David Rutley:** We welcome all steps to help move forward with the middle east peace process and follow those particular points with interest. …
David Lammy (Labour): The Minister will have heard the strength of feeling across the House this morning. Recently in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories we have seen new illegal settlements announced, increasing violence and terrorist attacks and a rise in civilian deaths. All those steps imperil a two-state solution, yet the Government’s focus has been on their ill-conceived and badly designed Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill. Reports suggest that our diplomats warned Ministers that it would breach our obligations under UN resolution 2334. Is that true? If so, why is the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), undermining UK foreign policy?

David Rutley: The shadow Secretary of State is correct that these are really concerning issues and there is a lot of passion on both sides of the House. The Government’s position was agreed by the FCDO and all relevant Government Departments. The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has written to the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee on that issue.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan’s answer, referred to above, can be read at https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-07-04/debates/19C6FFB2-A29E-494D-BEAD-9B51A6EC474A/ViolenceInTheWestBank#contribution-E1A96FB7-C90D-4328-AF26-802C197BE94E

Information about the proposed land bridge referred to above can be read at https://www.ynetnews.com/article/r1pmwvhtn

UN Resolution 2334, referred to above, can be read at https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf

Tom Randall (Conservative) [906058] In April three members of the British-Israeli Dee family were killed in an appalling terror attack. The Palestinian Authority continues to proudly send hundreds of millions of pounds to the terrorists behind these very same attacks. Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning this grotesque “pay for slay” policy?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley): The UK has not directly funded the Palestinian Authority since official development assistance reprioritisation in 2021. We do not fund prisoners’ payments and we believe that the prisoner payment system should be reformed so that it is needs-based, transparent and affordable. We continue to raise this at the highest levels with the Palestinian Authority.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [906059] We talk of a two-state solution, but we are witnessing an increase in illegal settlements and an increase in violence, not least in Jenin recently. How is the Secretary of State using the power of his office to set a new framework, using the articles of the UN declaration on human rights, to bring about a movement
towards peace, so that we see not just talk but action?

David Rutley: We remain committed to the middle east peace process and to finding a way forward. We use our convening power as the current president of the UN Security Council, and the Foreign Secretary will no doubt be discussing these issues while he is in New York at the UN Security Council.

https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-07-18/debates/A5EFFF51-F4F2-4A81-A990-12C0BC37884C/TopicalQuestions#contribution-1A85EF4C-C44E-41CC-A3BF-D136F2874E4F

House of Commons Written Answer

Palestinians: Development Aid

Desmond Swayne (Conservative) [193539] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will publish audit reports of the Palestinian Recovery and Development Programme.

David Rutley: Following Official Development Assistance (ODA) prioritisation exercises undertaken in March 2021, the UK no longer provides direct financial aid to the Palestinian Authority. All UK support to the Palestinian Authority is provided through technical advice, procured through commercial suppliers. The audits in question for the Palestinian Recovery and Development Programme relate to UK funding provided through the World Bank to the Palestinian Authority. Therefore, the UK is not the sole owner of the audit reports and is unable to release them unilaterally.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-07-12/193539

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186

Holocaust Memorial Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325

Online Safety Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137

Nakba Commemoration Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3461
Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188

Same Sex Marriage (Church of England)
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3438

Schools Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163

Universal Jurisdiction (Extension)
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3454

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

Consultations ** new or updated today

** closes tomorrow
Charities tax compliance (closing date 20 July 2023)

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill (closing date not specified – no later than 14 September 2023 but may be earlier)

A Human Rights Bill for Scotland (closing date 5 October 2023)
The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438

The future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales (closing date 26 October 2023)
https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/