



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

Humanitarian situation in Gaza: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report

Second Special Report of Session
2023–24

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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Second Special Report

The International Development Committee published its Second Report of Session 2023–24, [Humanitarian situation in Gaza](#) (HC 110), on 1 March 2024. The Government response was received on 1 May 2024 and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

1. The UK Government is grateful to the International Development Committee (IDC) for its timely report, *Humanitarian Situation in Gaza*. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), together with other Government Departments and international partners, is focussed on getting much needed aid into Gaza.
2. On 7 October 2023, Israel suffered the worst terror attack in its history at the hands of Hamas. Israel has the right to defend itself in compliance with international humanitarian law, but Palestinian civilians are facing a devastating and growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The UK Government has consistently called for an immediate pause in hostilities to get aid in and hostages out, then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.
3. The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have reiterated these messages with Prime Minister Netanyahu, as well as leaders in Qatar, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt and the UAE. The Government notes the international community will need to make significant efforts to deliver a reconstruction plan for Gaza.
4. The report rightly notes that there is a desperate need for increased humanitarian support to Gaza. As the Prime Minister said in his call with PM Netanyahu on 2 April, Israel's rightful aim of defeating Hamas will not be achieved by allowing a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The UK Government is focused on practical solutions that save lives. Our aid more than trebled in financial year 2023–24 and we are doing everything we can to get more aid in through land, air and sea.
5. The report helpfully highlights key themes—land crossings, deconfliction systems, famine concerns, possible breaches of international humanitarian law and plans to support Gaza after the current conflict—which we have also identified as priorities for action to alleviate the current dire humanitarian situation.
6. Ministers continue to raise concerns with the Government of Israel, working regionally and with international partners (the Arab States, UN, US and EU Member States) to secure humanitarian access and the release of all hostages.
7. The report rightly recognises the tremendous work of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society and Egypt's Ministries of Health and Population and Social Solidarity. The Government acknowledges how deeply impressive the support offered by Egypt is to injured and sick Palestinians from Gaza.

8. We continue to coordinate with like-minded international partners on plans for a sustained ceasefire and support for reconstruction of Gaza, after the current conflict has ended.

9. This response addresses the Committee's recommendations in the order in which they appear in the Conclusions and Recommendations section of the report.

Conclusion/Recommendation 1

The UK Government must call for all existing land crossings to be opened and for opening hours to be extended. This would speed up aid getting through the border and allow access to other areas of Gaza, particularly in the North. Ultimately, this is the only way to avoid famine. Pressure must be put on Israel to speed up the progress of aid through checkpoints and border crossings.

Agree

10. On 28 January 2024, the Foreign Secretary wrote an Op-Ed calling for an immediate pause in fighting to allow vital aid to get into Gaza.

11. When the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu on 2 April, he made clear the UK expects to see immediate action by Israel to end restrictions on humanitarian aid.

12. We welcome the undertaking given by Israeli Foreign Minister Katz to the Foreign Secretary on 2 April that Israel will increase the flow of aid into Gaza to 500 trucks a day in total, including 100 a day through the Jordan land corridor. Prime Minister Netanyahu has also promised to open Ashdod Port and the Erez border crossing into North Gaza for humanitarian deliveries – all things we have long pressed for. We want to see Israel fulfil these vital commitments as quickly as possible.

13. We continue to press Israel to make further changes to ensure more aid can be delivered effectively, including a major change in the conduct of hostilities to protect civilians, reform of Israel's deconfliction mechanism to ensure the safety of aid workers, and progress on the UN's minimum operating requirements, including more visas and driver approvals granted, as well as more trucks permitted to cross into Gaza.

14. The Foreign Secretary's Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Mark Bryson-Richardson, is based in the region and is working intensively to address the blockages preventing more aid reaching Gaza.

Conclusion/Recommendation 2

The UK Government must prioritise urgent discussions with the Israeli authorities to speed up security and improve the deconfliction systems so that aid workers can operate more safely. The UK Government should lead discussions with the international community to increase security for aid workers in the region.

Agree

15. The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

16. The killing of seven World Central Kitchen (WCK) personnel on 1 April only intensified our concerns about the humanitarian situation, protection of aid workers and issues of targeting and deconfliction. We need to see a fundamental change on the ground.

17. As the Foreign Secretary has said, we are carefully reviewing the initial findings of Israel's investigations into the killing of WCK aid workers and welcome the suspension of two officers as a first step. These findings must be published in full and followed up with a wholly independent review to ensure the utmost transparency and accountability. Their inquiry so far has highlighted the inadequate processes and the unacceptable conduct of the IDF personnel involved. This must never happen again.

18. Aid workers should never be targeted. Over two hundred aid workers have been killed in this conflict to date, more than any in one year in any other conflict globally. Israel must do much more to protect them and to ensure their safety so they can deliver urgently needed lifesaving humanitarian assistance.

19. The Foreign Secretary has been clear that guaranteed deconfliction for aid convoys and other humanitarian work is essential.

Conclusion/Recommendation 3

The UK Government must make it an absolute priority to avoid famine by getting sufficient amounts of food aid into Gaza, as measured by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). This will give certainty to the population there, which will ease other issues, including improving security for aid workers and disincentivising illicit market activity. This entails Israel opening up existing crossings, providing a more streamlined entry system and communicating about why goods are being returned.

Agree

20. As the occupying power in Gaza, Israel must ensure that humanitarian aid—including food, water and shelter—is available to people in Gaza. Israel needs to open more crossings, for longer, with fewer restrictions on what is allowed in. We welcome Israel's commitments to increase aid access made from 2 April, and want to see them met now.

21. The UK is doing everything we can to get more aid in as quickly as possible:

- On 6 April, the UK announced a package of military and civilian support to set up a maritime aid corridor to Gaza, including the deployment of a Royal Navy ship to join the life-saving mission in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- The ship, alongside new UK aid and British expertise, will support the establishment of an international humanitarian maritime corridor from Cyprus to Gaza, supported by many of our partner governments and the UN, and is expected to be operational in early May.

- As of 25 April, nine RAF airdrops have delivered 84.6 tonnes of aid, including ready-to-eat meals, water and rice, along the northern coastline of Gaza.

Conclusion/Recommendation 4

Commercial vehicles have always formed a vital part of supplies to Gaza. The UK Government must put pressure on Israel to allow commercial goods to enter and be delivered to Gaza safely to supplement other resources.

Agree

22. The UK Government agrees that commercial supplies must play a large role in the provision of essential supplies to Gaza, and has raised this point with Israeli authorities.

23. The UK continues to work with the UN and likeminded partners on proposals to increase the access of commercial trucks and support the Palestinian private sector to distribute goods.

24. UKAID programming is ready to support increased supplies for Gaza using the private sector, including from the West Bank.

Conclusion/Recommendation 5

Gazans also need to be supported to rebuild their own internal food market, from growing fruit and vegetables to raising livestock – all of which occurred before this crisis. The UK must build this into any future plans for its support to Gaza after the current conflict.

Agree

25. Gaza's economic recovery needs will require significant coordinated international support, working closely with the Palestinian leadership. The UK is engaging with the World Bank and UN agencies on planning for early recovery and reconstruction and also runs an existing private sector support programme which is exploring ways to support Gazan business. The FCDO's Chief Economist recently visited the OPTs to inform our planning on support to its economy. Efforts will need both to include and enable Gaza's economy and food production systems, including through a range of forms of support to, and engagement of, the private sector.

Conclusion/Recommendation 6

The UK Government must acknowledge the disruption this crisis is causing to the Egyptian economy and its public services. The UK Government must understand the resulting problems that Egypt is seeing with shortages of medical equipment and rising prices for its own population and offer the support that it requires (and not what the UK thinks that it may need).

Agree

26. We agree that the support being offered by Egypt to injured and sick Palestinians from Gaza in hospitals throughout the country is deeply impressive, and will have put a

strain on Egypt's health system. We have offered to assist Egypt through, for example, the deployment of medical teams. The British Embassy in Cairo remains in regular contact with the Ministry of Health and Population and will carefully consider any requests from the Ministry alongside our partners, including the WHO and other donors.

Conclusion/Recommendation 7

In its previous report, this Committee welcomed the Government's introduction of the Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation (OCSM), with a hub to consider atrocity prevention. The FCDO should revisit our previous report and look at how to improve the hub, because it should be forming a central part of the Government's response in Gaza and it appears not to have the resource to give the leadership across Whitehall that is required.

Partially Agree

27. The UK Government is grateful to the Committee for the insightful recommendations it made in its previous report, *From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world*. The Mass Atrocity Prevention (MAP) Hub is taking forward many of those recommendations. For example, the Hub works with international and civil society partners to share best practice and identify coordination opportunities, has assessed the needs of FCDO staff to enhance the atrocity prevention training offer, and has integrated atrocity risk analysis into global horizon scanning and early warning capabilities. We continually seek feedback to identify ways to improve how the Hub works across HMG.

28. We do not agree that the Hub does not have the required resource and leadership to fulfil its role. The Hub was established as a centralised support function to provide geographic teams with expert advice, datasets, and policy resources to raise understanding of atrocity risks and avenues to address them. Geographic teams rightly lead on making and implementing country-specific policies. We judge this partnership approach is the best way to ensure policy coherence between atrocity prevention and context-specific expertise. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, the MAP Hub has proactively supported relevant FCDO teams working on the conflict to understand, monitor and address atrocity risks. Lessons learned from atrocity prevention efforts in other contexts have also contributed to this advice.

Conclusion/Recommendation 8

It is difficult to see past the horrors that are ongoing in Gaza today. But the UK Government must plan for the next phase. These plans must include the Palestinian people and will include discussions with bilateral partners and also multilateral organisations. It is in no one's interest to create a dependent population, and this is something that the Gazans to whom the Committee spoke were very clear on.

Agree

29. We fully agree that we must plan for the future and that recovery and reconstruction efforts must be led by Palestinians. In particular, the Palestinian Authority has an important long-term role to play. It must take much needed steps on reform, including

setting out a pathway to democratic progress. As part of this we must work with our allies to provide serious, practical and enduring support needed to bolster the Palestinian Authority.

Conclusion/Recommendation 9

The UK Government must listen to the people of Gaza and include them in the plans for reconstruction. Allowing them to rebuild their businesses alongside their homes will allow much-needed economic activity to restart, help to restore the dignity of the Gazan population and rebuild their lives. The UK Government should consider all the tools at its disposal, such as the alternative financing mechanisms set out in the recent White Paper, to support Gazan businesses to support themselves. Where infrastructure grants are given, Gazan businesses must be the first considered for contracts with the UK Government looking at providing bank guarantees alongside.

Agree

30. The World Bank, UN and EU plan to undertake a Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment of Gaza, which will inform reconstruction planning. The UK fully supports putting Gazans and their economic recovery at the heart of the process, including through engaging Gazan firms and civil society organisations directly to deliver recovery and reconstruction, to facilitate economic and civic recovery. We are considering, in consultation with multilateral development bank partners, varied forms of support to enable this, such as grants and loans for liquidity, insurance cover, and political engagement to facilitate access to Gaza.

Conclusion/Recommendation 10

The UK has specialisms in which it can lead, such as Preventing Sexual Violence. The UK Government needs to prioritise working with Palestinian civil society in all stages of the rebuilding in Gaza and encourage international partners also to include the Palestinian people in their future plans. The rebuilding should happen in a manner that preserves their dignity as well as improve the living conditions and the economy.

Agree

31. We are conscious of the social and psycho-social dimensions of recovery for Gazan individuals and society. We have long-standing partnerships with Palestinian civil society organisations and, per our White Paper and past commitments to localisation, will put empowering local actors and accountability to those affected at the centre of our approach. We are also considering expanding our social protection approaches such as cash payments to the most vulnerable and cash for work, as part of reviving Gaza's social safety net, practically to improve incomes, conditions and dignity for Gazans.

32. We have on several occasions, including in the UN Security Council, offered the support of our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Team of Experts to both Israelis and Palestinians to support with developing a gender-responsive and survivor-centred response to reports of conflict related sexual violence. We are actively following up on this offer.

Conclusion/Recommendation 11

The UK Government should use its convening power and host a conference to consider how reconstruction of Gaza can be factored into future plans and how the international community can support that in a sustainable manner. This conference should include potential donor nations, multi-lateral organisations, such as the UN, and Palestinian businesses who have been involved in rebuilding Gaza previously and have expertise to share as well as a stake in the future.

Partially Agree

33. We agree that the international community must consider recovery and reconstruction now. We are working closely with a wide range of stakeholders, including potential donors and multilateral institutions. But we are not at this stage ready to commit to the UK hosting an international conference.

Conclusions/Recommendations 12 and 13

This Committee understands that the UK Government wants to see UNRWA improve its governance and then return to receiving funding for its work in Gaza. The UK Government must push for this to happen quickly, both so that UK funding continues but also that international partners are persuaded to restart their funding as well, otherwise the consequences for public services will be catastrophic, both in the Gaza Strip and in the other areas where UNRWA works, including the West Bank and refugee camps in the region.

UNRWA is the only functioning organisation in parts of Gaza and the people of Gaza need its support. Whether it needs to be reformed to support long-term regeneration in Gaza is an important question but is one for the future planning.

Agree

34. Allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel are appalling, which is why the UK took decisive action to pause future funding to UNRWA in line with the United States, Canada, Australia, the EU, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

35. The UN launched two independent investigations, one by the UN Office for Internal Oversight Services into the specific allegations, and one led by Catherine Colonna, to review UNRWA's neutrality procedures and policies.

36. The UN OIOS has completed an interim report of its investigation into the incident, and Catherine Colonna has published her final report into the neutrality of UNRWA. The report made fifty recommendations in eight different areas for improvements. The UN Secretary General welcomed the report and accepted the recommendations. UNRWA Commissioner General Lazzarini accepted the recommendations and committed to implement them in full.

37. The UK recognises that UNRWA has a vital role to play in providing aid and services in Gaza and the region. We recognise the operational and logistical role UNRWA plays on the ground and that it provides important distribution capacity for other agencies.

38. We remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, including through other UN agencies and British charities. Our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has had no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response.

39. We will set out our position on future funding to UNRWA following careful consideration of the final report, UNRWA's response and the ongoing OIOS investigation into the allegations.

Conclusions/Recommendation 14 and 16

It is not within this Committee's remit to consider International Law but, in every conversation, it was raised with us and the arguments made were compelling that breaches of international law are taking place. The UK Government must insist that Israel complies with its obligations under international humanitarian law. It must work with international partners to hold Israel to account in this. The UK Government must press for evidence to be gathered contemporaneously so that thorough investigations about compliance with international law on both sides can take place after the fighting stops.

Partially Agree

40. We were appalled by the barbaric terrorist acts by Hamas against Israel and international citizens on 7 October.

41. IHL binds state and non-state actors participating in an armed conflict. As a party to the conflict, Hamas is obliged to comply with international humanitarian law.

42. Ministers have been clear with Israel that we support its right to self-defence, but that it must uphold international humanitarian law.

43. Too many civilians have been killed. Israel should take care to limit operations to military targets and to minimise harm to civilians and civilian objects. Israel should also ensure effective deconfliction and take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

44. The FCDO regularly assesses Israel's capability and commitment to international humanitarian law (IHL) to determine whether there is a 'clear risk' that exported items might be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of IHL.

45. While we have grave concerns around humanitarian access, this is not sufficient to undermine our judgement that Israel is committed to comply with IHL in general.

Conclusion/Recommendation 15

Following the ruling by the International Court of Justice on 26 January, the UK Government must push Israel to allow the necessary aid into Gaza. The Committee has received no reassurance that healthcare workers and facilities are being protected, as is required under international humanitarian law, and the UK Government must insist that every measure is taken to offer this protection.

Agree

46. The Court's call for the immediate release of hostages and to get more aid into Gaza is a position that the UK Government has long advocated. Far too many aid workers and ordinary civilians have lost their lives in Gaza and the situation is increasingly intolerable. The Prime Minister was clear when he spoke to PM Netanyahu on 2 April that the UK expects to see immediate action by Israel to end restrictions on humanitarian aid, deconflict with the UN and aid agencies, protect civilians and repair vital infrastructure like hospitals and water networks.

47. We share the Committee's concern that health care workers and facilities must be protected, as provided in IHL. The Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister have underlined the need for Israel to ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, and to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of medical personnel and facilities.

48. It is imperative that those doing life-saving work are properly protected and allowed full, unhindered access to conduct their work safely.