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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 21 November 2023

[The Deputy Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our leader today is Dame Evelyn Glennie, who joins us remotely.

Dame Evelyn Glennie: Thank you for the opportunity to participate in time for reflection. Reflection is, I hope, an activity that we are all encouraged to participate in as part of our daily medicine.

I wonder what you feel the universal language of the world is. In my mind, it is listening. Listening belongs to us all. Although hearing gets old, listening does not. As I go through my life, I have come to realise that it is the participation of listening that is at the heart of every decision, action and experience that is encountered. Listening, in a way, is the superglue of life. Listening is the bridge builder and connector. Hearing has a beginning and an end, but listening is continuous.

Hearing can bring about the illusion of isolation and silence because we measure the experience by what we hear or what we cannot hear. Listening, on the other hand, cannot be measured. It is a sort of mysterious sixth sense that connects all our other senses together. No one learns how to listen. We are all born with an innate sense of listening. Unfortunately, however, we are inadvertently taught more how not to listen while thinking that we are cultivating better listening skills.

We know that nothing in the world really happens in isolation. My career as the first-ever full-time solo percussionist in the world did not happen in isolation. The most solo part of my journey has been listening to myself and recognising how listening ignites plasticity and purity. True listening really has no motives.

Through my foundation's mission to teach the world to listen, it is my aim to allow us all to be unselfish listeners so that we can assist and support one other to interpret self to self. That applies to all forms of communication, whether they are virtual or face to face. We all have an opportunity to make what we express, through whichever platforms, part of our tapestry, our story and our journey. Listening to ourselves and one

other allows a platform of curiosity to exist, and that leads to inquiring about things and questioning things about yourself, your surroundings and what is right in front of you. Listening helps us to learn and progress and open ourselves up to opportunities. It also helps to bring different minds together and really cements the power in partnerships.

Listening to our own spoken thoughts is a precious and necessary activity. When listening is silenced, anything can happen. Listening demonstrates compassion towards yourself and others and it helps to dissolve stigmas. From that, clarity can emerge, thus igniting conviction, choice and decision. That will leave room in the tank to build constructive listening bridges with all whom we encounter.

Thank you again for allowing me to speak with you as part of time for reflection.

Topical Question Time

14:04

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is topical question time. As ever, if a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Ferguson Marine (Chief Executive Bonus)

1. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the chief executive of Ferguson Marine is still entitled to a bonus despite the First Minister saying that he thought the practice should end. (S6T-01642)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): Despite every effort being made to ensure that no bonuses were paid to Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow senior management in 2022-23, that, as members will be aware, proved unavoidable due to historical contracts at the yard. The chief executive officer's contract entitles him to some bonus elements only if stringent key performance indicators are met. The Scottish Government has been clear that those should not involve a bonus being paid directly for vessels 801 and 802. Contracts for new FMPG employees do not include bonus elements.

Parliament will be updated with full details of a revised remuneration scheme once it is finalised.

Graham Simpson: What that shows is that no one pays any attention to what the First Minister wants. Today, which is the sixth anniversary of the fake launch of the Glen Sannox, we should be clear that nobody at the yard should be getting a bonus.

In April, Humza Yousaf said:

"There should not be bonuses"—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2023; c 12.]

paid—but there were. Audit Scotland said:

"While Scottish Government approval was sought, FMPG did not have explicit approval prior to payment."

Who sanctioned the latest bonuses? Why is David Tydeman in line for any more?

Richard Lochhead: As Graham Simpson will be aware, the bonus that was in the accounts related to 2022-23. As the First Minister said, because of the cost overruns and delays, any bonuses would be unacceptable and should not be paid. That is what the Scottish Government is currently working on.

There is now an arrangement whereby the Ferguson Marine board has to consult the Scottish Government—those discussions are on-going—over the future remuneration packages. As I have said, the cabinet secretary will bring final details of that package to Parliament in due course. However, the Scottish Government has made clear its view that there should be no bonus elements in relation to the two vessels. That is what we expect, and I think that that is in line with public expectations.

Graham Simpson: I am not sure that we found out anything from that.

It could possibly be argued at a stretch that Mr Tydeman should get some credit if he turns the yard into a viable business. However, we have learned this week that it has stopped work on a project for the Royal Navy because the Scottish Government—Neil Gray—refused the request for £25 million of investment for a new plating line, burning tables and better computer software. How much extra is the Government prepared to invest in the yard in order to turn it around?

Richard Lochhead: The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy laid out the current position in an oral statement to Parliament just last week. I think that Graham Simpson was present in the chamber for that statement, so he should be up to date on the current situation. In that statement, the cabinet secretary said that the discussions with the yard are on-going and that its business proposition is being discussed, but any proposition, of course, has to be in line with subsidy control regulations and value for money. Those discussions are on-going and, as I have said, the cabinet secretary, Neil Gray, wants to be open and transparent, and he will keep the Parliament up to date as soon as there are any steps forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementary questions. I will try to get in as many as possible, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I am led to believe that the contracts of new employees do not include bonus elements. I agree with Mr Simpson that the bonuses should not have been paid, but does the minister agree that the people who should be most angry are those in the workforce on the tools, who have been attempting to build the vessels for some time, have taken the political flak and have been used as a political football while management, which has changed regularly, has received unwarranted bonuses?

Richard Lochhead: From the First Minister downwards in the Scottish Government, we agree with the sentiments that Stuart McMillan has

outlined in terms of his support for employees at the yard.

As the cabinet secretary reiterated in the chamber just last week, there should be no doubt that the Government remains committed to shipbuilding on the Clyde and to the dedicated men and women at Ferguson Marine, who are, we know, doing their utmost to deliver the vessels. We continue to stand behind the workforce, and we are working with Ferguson Marine's management and board to secure a prosperous future for the business.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): These bonuses have been paid without Scottish Government approval. It has been reported that, at Scottish Water, three executives have received nearly £1 million in bonuses in the past five years. Will any review extend to executive bonuses in all publicly owned bodies?

Richard Lochhead: We expect all such payments to be in line with Scottish Government pay policy. Terms and conditions that significantly deviate from that policy cause ministers a great deal of concern. I cannot comment directly on the situation at Scottish Water, but I am happy for the relevant minister to follow up on that in a note to the member.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This issue reveals that the Government is completely impotent when it comes to dealing with bonuses at Ferguson Marine and at Scottish Water. Today, the unions said that the workers deserve certainty, but the only certain thing is that the bosses at Ferguson Marine will get bonuses that they do not deserve. Why is the Government incapable of providing any leadership for the future of the yard?

Richard Lochhead: As Willie Rennie rightly points out, this is an extremely tough time for workforces, be they in Scottish Water, Ferguson Marine or anywhere in the public or private sectors. We urge all management to first and foremost take into account the needs of their workforce.

We pay close attention to the pay and conditions and bonus regimes of those sectors, and at the same time, we must have regard for contractual obligations and market conditions to attract staff to our public bodies. We will pay close attention to all those issues.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Obscene amounts of money have been paid to well-paid executives, directors and management consultancy firms, but the workers in the Ferguson Marine yard want to know what the future of the yard will look like. Is the minister, or anyone in the Scottish Government, aware of any future contracts that the yard has secured beyond hulls

801 and 802, and, if so, what do those contracts look like?

Richard Lochhead: I will not take any lectures from Conservative members when it comes to awarding undue financial reward to certain people in our society, given that the United Kingdom Government lifted the cap on bankers' bonuses.

The member mentions Ferguson Marine. I assure him that the Scottish Government is working with the yard to examine options to deliver its initial investment proposals, so that it is compliant with subsidy control rules and aligned with current and potential future commercial opportunities for the yard. Those intense discussions between the Scottish Government and Ferguson Marine are on-going.

Midwifery Services (Workforce Numbers)

2. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that stagnating workforce numbers, amongst other factors, are contributing to increased pressure on midwifery services. (S6T-01639)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): We hugely value our midwifery workforce and the high-quality care that it offers across Scotland. Balancing our declining birth rate in Scotland with increased training and recruitment means that we have a significantly increased qualified midwife to birth ratio.

We constantly look at ways to enhance staffing levels and support workforce wellbeing for all parts of our national health service, including midwifery, and our nursing and midwifery task force is a key part of that. The task force will recommend action improving workplace culture and supporting longer-term workforce sustainability, practice flexibility, recruitment and retention and diversification of training pathways.

Carol Mochan: An article in the *Scotland on Sunday* newspaper highlighted key extracts from the recently published Royal College of Nursing Scotland's "State of Maternity Service 2023" report. It states:

"we do not see these ever-larger surges in midwives coming out of the universities making a difference to overall numbers."

The report goes on to state:

"The big risk is that rather than sustainably building up a strong workforce, the effect of these new midwives just seems to fizzle out as staff leave."

Why do workforce numbers in midwifery continue to stagnate, and when will the profession see a truly comprehensive and, importantly, measurable plan from the Government that highlights how those challenges will be overcome?

Jenni Minto: In June this year, we had 2,509 whole-time equivalent qualified midwives. That is 8.3 qualified nurses and midwives per 1,000 of the population, compared with 6.3 in England. That means that nursing and midwifery levels are 32 per cent higher per head of population in Scotland than in England. However, we recognise that we need to work harder on that, and we will publish the nursing and midwifery workforce plan in 2024.

Carol Mochan: I have met midwives from my region and from across the country. Their stories are consistent. They love the job and are passionate about the services, but they know that they are overworked. In my local health board, midwives are currently handling caseloads that are almost 30 per cent bigger than set out in the “Best Start” plan.

The reality is that the Scottish Government has not delivered a successful plan to support our midwives; has not implemented the safe staffing legislation that was passed in the Parliament in 2018; and has not ensured that all health boards are signed up to the equally safe at work programme. Do midwives have the right to feel badly let down by the Government?

Jenni Minto: Midwives in Scotland do a fantastic job. I accept that there is pressure in the circumstances that they work in. However, we are working closely with midwives and the centre for workforce supply to develop resources and a strategy to ensure that, in Scotland, we give them the best conditions that they can work in.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): It is clear that ensuring a strong pipeline of students will play an important role in increasing the workforce, especially given the need to recruit midwives in Dumfries and Galloway. Will the minister provide further information about what the Scottish Government is doing to support midwifery students to train?

Jenni Minto: We are taking a range of actions to support midwifery students. In 2020, we increased the non-means-tested, non-repayable student bursary to £10,000, which is the highest in the United Kingdom. In addition, free tuition is provided for eligible undergraduate students, to help with expenses.

However, I understand the financial challenges that are faced by all students, which is why we have established a short-life working group to review the placement expenses guidance and to consider what more can be done.

Autumn Statement: Scottish Government Priorities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Shona Robison on the autumn statement and Scottish Government priorities. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions. I call the cabinet secretary to speak for around 10 minutes.

14:16

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): Tomorrow, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will make his autumn statement, setting out the United Kingdom Government’s budgetary plans for 2024-25. The actions in his statement will largely set the context for our budget on 19 December.

The disappointing reality is that the amount that Scotland has to spend on services is still largely driven by a Westminster that is wedded to even deeper austerity. That means that, although I will announce our budget in 28 days’ time, I still do not know the quantum of funding that is available to support Scotland’s needs.

It is only a little over a year since the disastrous Truss mini-budget, which turbocharged the cost of living crisis, inflicting misery on individuals, communities and businesses. We have seen 14 increases to interest rates, and stubbornly high inflation. Even given the recent reduction in inflation, prices are still around 15 per cent higher than at the start of last year. Inflation remains at more than double the Bank of England’s target rate. The Resolution Foundation expects the current UK parliamentary term to be the worst for living standards since the 1950s. Tomorrow, the chancellor needs to recognise that and to change course.

Our public finances have continued to face significant challenges from inflation, Brexit, the war in Ukraine, the increased costs of public sector pay and a capital budget that does not come close to what is required. Despite those challenges, I am pleased that, last week, the Auditor General for Scotland gave the Scottish Government’s accounts for 2022-23 an unqualified audit opinion—for the 18th year running.

This year, we have prioritised public services and delivered fair pay deals for our public sector workers. However, those come at a cost, and we must deliver a balanced budget. Pay deals added an estimated £1.26 billion to our recurring pay costs in 2023-24, and £1.75 billion across the public sector. That was around £800 million above

the amount that was budgeted for 2023-24. We have worked to try to mitigate the impact of Westminster austerity but, without a change in course from Westminster, I fear that we are now at the limits of what it is possible to mitigate using the powers of devolution.

Today, I wrote to the Finance and Public Administration Committee to outline the measures that I have taken to ensure that those costs can be met in this financial year. Those decisions have been exceptionally difficult, but they are necessary to protect the services that are needed most.

In total, savings and funding prioritisation of £680 million have been required in-year, with £284 million already being expressed in the autumn budget revision and the remaining £396 million that will be set out in the spring budget revision. Of those reductions, £391 million is resource and £289 million is capital.

The reductions have included £10.5 million from the future transport fund; £30 million from energy industries capital programmes; savings delivered by the Scottish Funding Council, including £46 million from the withdrawal of the strategic change transformation fund as communicated in May; £3 million from efficiencies in Marine Scotland; £28 million from agricultural budgets, with a commitment to return that funding in future years; and a redeployment of £6 million that is held in reserves by Forestry and Land Scotland, with that funding also to be returned in future years. Further details are included in the letter to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, which was provided to Opposition business managers prior to this statement.

Furthermore, as inflationary pressures continue to exacerbate the cost of living crisis and pressures for households and businesses across Scotland, I have protected overall health spending, our investment in key programmes such as the Scottish child payment, and the tripling of the fuel insecurity fund for this financial year.

This challenge is a result of prolonged Westminster austerity and is not unique to Scotland. Last month, the Welsh Government set out that it needs to find £600 million in savings before the end of the financial year. Accounting for differences in the size of our budgets, that would be equivalent to more than £1 billion for Scotland.

The devolved Administrations have worked together to call on the United Kingdom Government for additional funding and in-year budget flexibilities to support the management of the pressures that we all face. The response so far to the calls has been, at best, insufficient.

In developing our budget for 2024-25, I am guided by our three missions of equality, community and opportunity, and by the Bute

house agreement. In doing so, I will be reflecting on the feedback from committees following their pre-budget scrutiny process.

When I presented the medium-term financial strategy to Parliament in May, I laid out the scale of the challenge that we face. I showed that our central resource spending outlook for 2024-25 was £1 billion higher than our central funding scenario, which was based on the Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts at that time. Our funding for capital projects is facing a real-terms cut next year.

We must meet those challenges in the 2024-25 budget. The decisions that we take must be underpinned by reform to ensure that people in Scotland get value from the taxes that they pay and secure a sustainable future for our public services.

Last week, the Auditor General for Scotland raised the importance of reforming our public services to ensure that they remain financially sustainable in the long term. We are committed to public service reform that will help to deliver fiscally sustainable public services that improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.

The powers that this Parliament needs to deliver a better budget for Scotland are still retained at Westminster. The chancellor needs to act tomorrow to deliver for investment in public services and infrastructure; to prioritise net zero and tackling fuel insecurity; and to support people with the on-going cost of living crisis. I have written to him to stress the importance of those areas. From the briefing to the media in recent days, it appears that that may not be the course that he follows, with suggestions that tax cuts may be prioritised over investment in public services. bluntly, when Westminster consistently underinvests in public services, it means that we have less funding to spend on our public services in Scotland.

As I have set out, those concerns are shared by the other devolved Governments. The Welsh finance minister and I both raised the need for increased funding to address that with the UK Government directly.

That is especially important for infrastructure investment. However, our budget for capital investment is constrained by UK Government spending decisions, with funding projected to fall in real terms by 6.7 per cent between 2023-24 and 2027-28, and potentially by more, given sustained inflation. That, of course, limits our ability to deliver projects at the required pace.

I have called on the chancellor to rectify that. This must be new money and not funding that we have already allocated to other commitments. That happened with the UK Government's recent

announcement in response to our request for additional funding to support flood recovery, which was disingenuous to say the least.

A key part of this is ensuring that there is the necessary investment in the infrastructure that we need to meet our net zero targets and to realise the opportunities for jobs and the economy. That should include confirming a decision on the Acorn carbon capture and storage project—we have pressed the UK Government repeatedly on that, and we need to see action—and providing an appropriate market mechanism for hydro power, because lack of action from the UK Government is preventing Scotland from fully realising its potential.

It is unacceptable that, in a country as energy rich as Scotland, about 830,000 households—33 per cent of all households—are in fuel poverty. Although the energy price cap has dropped, many consumers are still paying significantly more than they were two years ago. With Gillian Martin, I have called for a social tariff for priority consumers and for the £400 energy bill support scheme to be reinstated. The UK Government must also take longer-term action to reform the electricity market so that everyone benefits from the net zero transition.

We can all see the pain that the cost of living crisis is causing. We are using our social security powers to deliver a system that is built on dignity, fairness and respect. This year, we are investing £5.3 billion in Scottish Government benefits and payments—including our unique Scottish child payment—which will reach about 1.2 million people.

However, the majority of social security spend in Scotland remains reserved to the UK Government. I have called on the chancellor to increase working-age benefits in line with inflation to ensure that they retain their real-terms value for struggling families across the UK. I also urge him to go further by legislating for an essentials guarantee that would provide those who are most in need with the most basic of necessities. That would benefit 8.8 million families and provide dignity and security for people who rely on universal credit. I have, again, called on the UK Government to remove the heinous rape clause, the two-child cap and the benefit cap, which disproportionately affect women and children.

I have been frank with members about the challenges that we face and the difficult decisions that we have had to take to balance our budget and make best use of public money. We are doing all that we can with the limited powers that we have, but we need the UK Government to step up and use its powers for the benefit of Scotland. The priority for any fiscal headroom should be investment in public services. Tomorrow, the

chancellor has the opportunity to make a real difference for people across Scotland, and I urge him to take it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow up to 20 minutes for questions, after which we will need to move on to the next item of business.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I was going to begin by complimenting the cabinet secretary, who I thought was very gracious at this morning's Finance and Public Administration Committee meeting when she acknowledged that, through the fiscal framework discussions, relations between the Scottish Government and the UK Government have been convivial. That is a good sign. However, her statement has completely undermined that, because it was a catalogue of negativity in which she blamed Westminster for everything that has gone wrong in the Scottish Government.

I want to ask the cabinet secretary three questions. First, she was right when she said in her recent letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that businesses in Scotland have faced serious challenges in recent years. Why, therefore, did the Scottish Government refuse, in last year's budget, to pass on the same rates relief as its counterparts in England and Wales? Virtually the entire business community called for that in order to stimulate economic growth and protect Scottish businesses' competitiveness.

Secondly, the cabinet secretary cited tourism and hospitality as sectors that face particular challenges, but does she accept that one of the biggest challenges that they face is entirely of the Scottish Government's own making, when it comes to the unworkable policy on short-term lets?

Thirdly, the cabinet secretary talked about public services, but will she finally acknowledge that one of the biggest difficulties that they face comes as a result of the crippling Scottish National Party cuts to local government funding over a sustained period?

Shona Robison: To be precise, I point out that I described my discussions with the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, John Glen, as an "oasis in a desert"—the desert being the rest of the UK Government—when I was talking about our difficult relationship with the UK Government in terms of making ourselves heard and getting it to take on board the needs of Scotland's public services.

On Liz Smith's point about negativity, I am sorry, but there is a lot to be negative about. The choices that we face will be set largely by the choices of the UK Government tomorrow.

I said in my statement that the UK Government should prioritise public services. Liz Smith, in her final question, talked about local government funding and seemed to agree with me that the chancellor should prioritise public services funding. I hope that, if the chancellor does not do that tomorrow, but instead prioritises tax cuts for better-off people over public sector funding, Liz Smith will stand with me and will criticise him equally for that choice.

On business support, we have for many years agreed to and supported the number 1 ask of business, which is that we freeze the rates poundage. We will come to our conclusions about business support as we take forward the budget discussions over the next few weeks.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I thank the Deputy First Minister for advance sight of the statement.

In 16 years of Conservative Government we have had 16 years of short-term thinking, poor transparency and poor sustainability. It is therefore little wonder that the Deputy First Minister wrote a letter in such terms to the chancellor.

However, is the Scottish Government not making many of the same mistakes? On transparency, she rightly asked how the mooted fiscal changes will be paid for, but how will the council tax freeze be paid for, and will local authorities be asked to foot the bill?

On long-term planning, the Scottish Fiscal Commission is clear that there is a £2 billion hole, but where is the plan to address that?

On growth, cuts are being made to infrastructure investment in things such as ports and motorways. Does that not undermine the economic growth and growth in incomes that we need if we are to gain, through the fiscal framework, the extra money that is so badly needed?

Shona Robison: As I set out in my statement, the challenges that the Scottish Government is facing are exactly the same as the challenges that are being faced by the Welsh Labour Government, and it says exactly the same thing. The issues are the UK Government's lack of financial flexibility and the quantum that is delivered for public services in Scotland and Wales. There is nothing exceptional about the Scottish Government's position—it is exactly the same as the Welsh Government's position. Indeed, Northern Irish public services face the same problem.

On transparency, I do not think that anyone could criticise me for not laying out the scale of the problem in my letter to the Finance and Public Administration Committee. That letter lays out the difficult decisions that we have had to take to balance our budget in 2023-24, and it intimates

the even greater challenge for next year, should additional resources not come to the Scottish Government, given the impact of inflation and all the other impacts that I laid out in my statement.

I absolutely accept the point on fiscal sustainability, and I will lay out in the budget the steps that we are taking on that. The Auditor General has also challenged us to do that. When I set out, in the medium-term financial strategy, the scale of the problem for next year and beyond, I was clear that there are measures that we had to take ourselves—not least on public services reform.

However, let us not beat about the bush. Tomorrow, the chancellor could solve the issues that Wales and Scotland face by making sure that the priority is public services funding. I hope that the Labour Party will support us in calling for that. If it does not, that will speak volumes.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Scotland's budget process, including scrutiny of the draft budget, is heavily constrained by a timetable that is, in effect, imposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and by the imposition of one-year settlements. No detail of the chancellor's autumn statement is provided in advance. Given that, what difficulties does it present in preparing Scotland's draft budget, particularly during the cost of living crisis, when it is so crucial to protect Scotland's public services and invest in infrastructure to build a fairer, more equal and prosperous Scotland?

Shona Robison: Kenny Gibson makes the important point that the lateness of the autumn statement makes it particularly difficult to plan for Scotland's 2024-25 budget. The budget process is complex to develop and is reliant on forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Scottish Fiscal Commission for finalisation of the tax and social security policies, alongside portfolio spending plans. We will always endeavour to produce a Scottish budget at the earliest opportunity for the Parliament, but the complexity and risks that are now embedded in developing the Scottish budget and its forecasts mean that a late UK autumn statement represents a particular challenge to that.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the Scottish Government support a continued freeze on fuel duty?

Shona Robison: We have set out our priorities in a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The priorities that I have set out clearly today are that the resources that are available to the chancellor should go on funding public services and that they should not go on tax cuts for the better off, such as through cuts to inheritance tax and support for bankers' bonuses. Those are our priorities. It is for

the Tories in the Parliament to set out theirs. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let us listen to the questions and answers.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned tax cuts. If there were to be tax cuts tomorrow at Westminster, would poorer people or richer people suffer more?

Shona Robison: We have had no engagement from the UK Government on its plans to cut tax. They are always seen in briefings to the media. We do not know where the tax cuts will land, how they will be funded or whom they are to be targeted at, so it is difficult to answer John Mason's question, at this stage. The track record of the Tory Government suggests that the poorest people in our society are unlikely to be the ones who benefit most from any of its policies. We will set out our tax plans in the budget on 19 December.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To compensate for its financial mismanagement, the Scottish Government is raiding budgets that are essential to meeting our net zero targets. It is also kicking the can down the road on when it will repay the farmers their missing millions. What impact will those budget cuts have on meeting our net zero targets and when will farmers get their missing millions?

Shona Robison: I wonder whether, if Rhoda Grant were sitting in the Welsh Parliament, she would have said the same to her Welsh Labour Government colleagues, who have had to announce the same type of in-year spending reductions because of the same pressures on budgets. There is no difference.

We have set out our priorities. None of the decisions has been easy. I said in my statement that the agriculture reductions that I set out will be returned to the budget in a way that aligns with the spending profile of those budgets. I am happy to set that out. I will meet NFU Scotland tomorrow to have further discussions about the matter.

I hope that, instead of blaming the Scottish Government, Labour will, as its Welsh Assembly colleagues have done, join us in pointing the finger where it should be pointed: at the UK Tory Government.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The Westminster Parliament has cut our capital and revenue budgets, thus affecting what can be invested. There are other adverse effects, including inflation and the cost of borrowing. In addition to that, reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete is added to the list.

What confirmation has the Scottish Government received from the UK Government with regard to

the capital and resource budgets? Will those budgets at least increase with inflation in order to protect the investment that the Scottish Government is attempting to make?

Shona Robison: We have had no confirmation from the UK Government that budgets will increase in line with inflation. The funding that we have received from the UK Government has not matched the scale of the challenge that we face, with inflation eroding our spending power. Although we are using the levers at our disposal, that hinders our response to the economic turmoil that we face.

The cut to capital is particularly difficult because of the investments that we want to make. The real-terms cut to capital budgets for the foreseeable future will have a major impact. At the Scottish budget, I will set out our infrastructure investment plan, but there is no doubt that the cut will have a huge impact on our infrastructure here, in Scotland, and, in turn, on our ability to grow the Scottish economy, which is helped by that infrastructure investment.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The national health service is in peril like never before in its 75-year history. Staff and patients look to the Scottish and UK Governments for hope, but the waiting lists and staff shortages are as bad as ever. There is little confidence that the chancellor's autumn statement or the steps that the Scottish Government will take will change anything.

Has the Cabinet Secretary for Finance had discussions with health boards about their finances for this year? Discussions about cuts appear to be under way already, because boards simply do not have enough money.

Shona Robison: Our 2023-24 Scottish budget provides record funding of over £19 billion, providing new investment of more than £1 billion in supporting recovery and reform to secure sustainable public services. The health service has, of course, remained a priority for many years and we continue to invest, with a total increase of over £730 million to NHS boards in 2023-24, which is nearly 6 per cent.

That is in the face of rising costs—with inflation and all the impacts that it has—and the pay deals, as I mentioned in my statement. Trying to continue to deliver services and to deal with the Covid backlog is a challenge, and there is no way to express it any differently. We will continue to prioritise health funding, but members should be under no illusion: it will be very challenging to do that if we do not see a real commitment from the chancellor tomorrow to additional funding for the health service.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The UK Government has given strong indications that it is likely to reduce public service funding across England, while indicating that welfare claimants who do not engage with their jobcentre or take work offered may lose benefit support. Can the finance secretary comment on whether a cut in NHS funding in England will lead to less by way of consequential or less funding for the Scottish Government to spend on health and social care? Will she join me in condemning outright the removal of welfare support from those who need it the most?

Shona Robison: On Emma Harper's first point, yes: whatever funding we get here for public services in Scotland absolutely depends on departmental allocations and spending decisions by the UK Government. Whether there is less or more for health determines what we get, which is why it is so important that there are additional resources for the health service.

I do condemn the plans to remove support from some of the most vulnerable people. We have consistently opposed the widespread use of sanctions, as there is clear evidence that they do not work and that, at best, they lead people into unstable work while causing further health problems and significant harm. It would be a shocking state of affairs if tax cuts for the better-off were funded at the expense of the poorest in society.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Apologies for being late: I was losing a battle with the printer next door.

Progressive tax changes secured by the Greens are worth £1 billion to Scotland every year. There is still scope to make income tax fairer and to raise more, but we also need to broaden our tax base and not be so dependent on income, which is why measures such as visitor and cruise ship levies are so important. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, although Scotland's tax and social security system is already the most progressive in the UK, we can make further progress in delivering tax reforms that are focused on the ability to pay and in maximising funding for our public services?

Shona Robison: As Ross Greer has said, the Scottish Government has already delivered one of the most progressive income tax systems in the UK while, importantly, raising extra revenue to invest in public services and Scotland's economy. It has been shown that, because of the decisions that we have made, 10 per cent of households have seen their incomes increase by almost 4 per cent compared with the rest of the UK. That is driven largely by the flagship policy of the Scottish child payment. As Ross Greer knows, decisions on tax policy for 2024-25 will be set as part of the budget on 19 December. In the run-up to the

budget, I look forward to continuing to discuss with him and his Green colleagues, and with others across the Parliament, what that should look like.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary has been at pains to stress the need to invest in public services, but, astonishingly for a Cabinet Secretary for Finance, not once in her statement did she mention economic growth. Does she accept that driving growth should be a key focus for the Scottish Government, through measures such as targeting investment and boosting skills development, particularly through colleges? The Fraser of Allander Institute recently showed that every £1 invested in colleges delivered a boost to the economy of more than £8.

Shona Robison: We have been very clear about the need for economic growth. We set that out clearly in our national strategy for economic transformation—NSET—as well as covering the levers that we will use for investment in net zero, green energy and targeting growth sectors, which we know is important in relation to growth in tax revenues.

However, we will not take any lectures from Brian Whittle or the Tories on economic management, given the catastrophe of the Truss mini-budget. I cannot remember whether Brian Whittle was a supporter of Liz Truss, but the damage that her budget inflicted on the Scottish economy should embarrass Brian Whittle and his colleagues for some time to come.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The UK Government has, so far, failed to confirm any additional support for families that are facing pressures as a result of the soaring cost of living. If Westminster is incapable of taking any decisive action, it is clear that Scotland urgently needs the powers to do so itself. Can the Deputy First Minister provide an update on the Scottish Government's latest engagement with the UK Government on the transfer of further powers to the Scottish Government over, for instance, the economy, energy, employment and social security—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary.

Kevin Stewart: —so that the Scottish Government can—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary!

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government has proposed further devolution of important powers to the Parliament to address many of the issues that the member has covered. The devolution of employment law was supported by the Parliament earlier this month, and the devolution of migration powers was debated last week. Devolution of

those powers could help us to grow our population base and, in turn, grow the economy. However, it is clear that the UK Tory Government has no intention of providing Scotland with the further powers that we need. Instead, it has undermined and constrained our existing powers, not least with the misuse of the Internal Market Act 2020. I would therefore not hold my breath in that respect.

Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Where is the ring-fenced £28 million that Shona Robison, the finance secretary, promised to return to Scotland's agricultural budget? When will it be put back?

Shona Robison: As I said in my statement, we will return the money to agricultural budgets and, as I said in answer to a previous question, we will do that in line with the spending requirements of the sector. I will discuss that further with NFU Scotland when I meet it tomorrow. I will set out further details in the budget when we come to that on 19 December.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. That concludes this item of business. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business to allow front benches to change.

Situation in the Middle East

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-11342, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the situation in the middle east. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. I call the First Minister, Humza Yousaf, to speak to and move the motion. You have up to 13 minutes.

14:48

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Like so many others, I will never forget the morning of 7 October. Nadia and I woke to messages from my mother-in-law, Elizabeth, who was in Gaza and who was clearly in distress at the unfolding situation. On a call, my mother-in-law described to me the scenes that she was witnessing that very morning: rockets being fired from Gaza towards Israel. She was watching news reports that militants had entered southern Israel and were carrying out attacks, murder and even hostage taking. The fear in her voice was palpable. There was no jubilation in the streets of their neighbourhood; just fear of the inevitable retaliation that would be forthcoming.

All of us who were watching the scenes unfold on 7 October did so in horror. Members of the Scottish Parliament are unified in their resolute condemnation of Hamas's abhorrent terrorist attacks. The vicious and calculated killing of innocent people and the kidnapping of men, women, children and the elderly in Israel cannot be condoned.

I hope that members are also unified in their resolute condemnation of the humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in Gaza. The killing of innocent men, women and children in Gaza who have nothing to do with Hamas also cannot be justified.

Those two positions are not at odds with each other—in fact, quite the opposite. They recognise that all human life is equal. The life of a Palestinian is worth no less than the life of an Israeli, and vice versa. Both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace and security.

We might be thousands of miles away from Israel and Gaza, but, unfortunately, the brutal reality of the conflict has been brought all too close to home. It has been reported that more than 1,200 Israelis were killed during Hamas's atrocious terror attack. It was the single biggest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. Among them was Bernard Cowan, who was originally from East Renfrewshire, where many members of his family still live. Bernard was a husband, a father

and a grandfather. When I met his mother, Irene, in Giffnock shul during a service of prayer, she told me of the grief that can be felt only by a parent who has had to mourn the loss of their child.

The events of 7 October have deeply scarred our Jewish community in Scotland and those around the world. It is a community in mourning and, now, many are living in fear. Many families in Israel, such as the family of 13-year-old Yagel Yaakov, who has been taken hostage by militants, are in a state of despair, worrying about their loved ones and not knowing whether they are alive or dead. That is why this Government and, I am certain, this Parliament are unequivocal in our demands that hostages be released so that they can be reunited with those whom they love.

The grief, sorrow and despair that are felt by many people in our Israeli communities in Scotland are also felt by our Palestinian communities here, too, who have lost their families. I take the example of Dr Ibrahim Khadra, a senior academic at the University of Strathclyde, whom I see in the gallery today. I met Dr Khadra last week. He told me the devastating news that 70 members of his extended family in Gaza had been killed. The pain was indescribable as he fought back tears and told me of the dreams of his little nieces and nephews that were no more.

In that one example alone, there should be a lesson for all of humanity the world over. One of the oldest lies that is ever told of war is that people can be collateral damage. Let me be clear about this. Babies are not collateral damage. Children are not collateral damage. The elderly are not collateral damage. Innocent men, women and children are not collateral damage. They are human beings who deserve to live and grow old and not to be killed for the crimes of others.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly made it clear that Israel, like any other country in the world, has a right to protect its citizens from terror. However, no country, Israel included, has a right to ignore international humanitarian law. That is why this Government has repeatedly called for an end to the 16-year blockade and siege of Gaza. It is why this Government is unequivocal in its condemnation of the Israeli Government cutting off water, food, fuel and supplies to the entire population of Gaza at the beginning of this latest cycle of violence. Collective punishment can never be justified.

The Scottish Government supports wholeheartedly the International Criminal Court investigating reports of any breaches of international law. I have written to the United Kingdom Government, urging it to back the ICC in its investigation of war crimes being committed by any party during the conflict.

The suffering in Gaza has shaken the world. More than 13,000 Palestinians have reportedly been killed in Israel's offensive, two thirds of them women and children. To put that into some perspective, that is the equivalent of more than 300,000 people being killed in the United Kingdom. At least 1.7 million people are currently internally displaced within Gaza and are struggling to find safety and access to food and water.

In the past week, the situation in Gaza's hospitals has deteriorated dramatically. On Sunday, the World Health Organization described Gaza's Al-Shifa hospital as "a death zone". To save lives, doctors such as my own brother-in-law Mohammed are forced to practise medieval medicine, reportedly amputating limbs, stitching up serious wounds and even performing caesarean sections without sufficient anaesthetic. That cruelty cannot be allowed to continue. There is no moral justification—none—for the bombing of medical facilities or of United Nations schools that are being used as shelters. Humanitarian organisations and medical facilities must be given special protections under international law and must be allowed to deliver life-saving services to those in need.

The people of Gaza are living in fear not only of missiles: they are at grave risk of starvation, dehydration and infection. According to the UN World Food Programme, supplies of food and water are "practically non-existent". The entire population is being deprived of the basic means of survival, and the ability of humanitarian agencies to safely provide those essentials has been severely curtailed by the lack of access to fuel and the loss of humanitarian workers and medical personnel.

The Scottish Government's position remains consistent: in the face of such destruction, death and inhumanity, an immediate ceasefire, agreed by all sides, is needed to ensure the protection of innocent civilians and the delivery of essential supplies, including food, fuel, water and medical provisions.

Some people have suggested that we should be seeking to achieve a humanitarian pause. Do we want simply to pause the killing of innocent men, women and children, only to resume a few hours later? Surely we must, and can, strive for better. For the sake of the people of Gaza, who are living in a nightmare of unimaginable terror, and for that of the Israeli hostages who remain captive, this Parliament and the international community must unite in calling for an immediate ceasefire.

Let me be clear: Gaza belongs to the Palestinian people and, whatever its future, it must remain under their control. No one has the right to expel Gazans from their land. Many Palestinians will wish to remain in Gaza, because it is their

land, and it is right that the current focus is on calls for a ceasefire and on providing humanitarian aid.

However, an estimated 50 per cent of buildings in northern Gaza have been turned into rubble, and the dropping of more than 10,000 bombs, missiles and projectiles on one of the most densely populated areas in the world has caused complete devastation. Should there be a need to provide sanctuary for refugees, we have called on the UK Government to use existing resettlement schemes to work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to establish a route to safety for the most vulnerable Gazans.

As I have reiterated, Scotland is ready to play its part in any such scheme and in the medical evacuation of injured citizens from Gaza, and of Israeli citizens if that is required, through activation of the UK medical evacuation scheme. Just as hospitals in the United Arab Emirates have helped to treat injured Gazans, Scottish hospitals are ready to treat injured civilians when we can.

This Parliament stands as one and asserts that the horrors in Israel and Palestine can never justify expressions of antisemitism, of Islamophobia, or of racial or religious hatred of any kind, in Scotland or elsewhere.

I have never hidden the fact that I am Muslim—indeed, I am very proud of it. My faith is intertwined in history and theology with our Jewish friends, and we are of the Abrahamic tradition, alongside Christians. In Scotland, the Muslim and Jewish communities have enjoyed decades of friendship and decades of shared humanity and faith. Nowhere is that more evident than in East Renfrewshire, which is home to Scotland's largest Jewish community and a significant Muslim population, who have lived side by side in harmony for many years. We cannot be complacent. We must all be proactive in rooting out any hint of Islamophobia or antisemitism wherever it occurs.

Even though it feels impossible to look past the current horrors of war, we must ensure that the perpetual cycle of violence that we see far too often finally ends, once and for all, in a peaceful resolution. To that end, there must be a renewed and serious international effort towards a two-state solution—Israeli and Palestinian states that can co-exist in safety and security and with equal rights for all of their citizens.

Unfortunately, the world has not kept its promise to the Palestinian people. They have not been given a free sovereign state following the 1967 borders, as they were promised. It is quite the opposite: the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank is not only illegal, but works against a peaceful resolution.

It is simply no longer enough to pay lip service to a two-state solution. We must take steps to turn that into a reality. To that end, I have written to the Prime Minister and Sir Keir Starmer, urging them to immediately take steps to ensure that the UK recognises the state of Palestine. It is only with full recognition of Palestine as a state in its own right that we can truly move towards a two-state solution.

To prevent further deaths, the bombs and rockets must stop. The Scottish Government continues to call for an immediate ceasefire, for the safe release of all hostages, for an end to the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza, for an end to the siege of Gaza and for all parties to abide by international law. The UK Government and the international community must use their influence to prevent the further loss of innocent life. Every child, the world over, deserves to grow old. The children of Gaza and Israel deserve nothing less. It is our moral obligation to act. Let us hope, even in the darkest of times, that humanity prevails.

I move,

That the Parliament unequivocally condemns in the strongest possible terms Hamas's barbaric and unjustifiable terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens on 7 October 2023, and demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages; agrees that all human life is equal, abhors the loss of innocent lives, and affirms the right of all Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security; further agrees that the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza, including women and children who have been besieged by Israeli forces, must stop; associates itself with the United Nations Secretary-General's statements that there must be an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to allow civilians to escape harm, for hostages to be released, for humanitarian aid to reach those in need, and affirming that international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, must be upheld; reiterates its solidarity with Scotland's Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian communities and condemns antisemitism, Islamophobia or any other form of hatred; welcomes the Scottish Government's contribution of £750,000 towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East's flash appeal for Gaza, and the humanitarian assistance announced by the UK Government; reaffirms that a credible, lasting and sustainable peace can only be based on the two-state solution through reinvigorated diplomatic and political efforts in the Middle East Peace Process, and agrees with many in the international community that all parties must agree to an immediate ceasefire.

15:02

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I begin in the spirit of the consensus that the First Minister achieved in his speech, during what is unequivocally a desperate and tragic situation. It is worth stating at the outset that there are broad areas of common agreement within the Scottish Parliament—more than many would admit to. I listened very carefully to the First Minister, and I found it very difficult to disagree with almost anything that he said in his measured and

eloquent speech. There is a difference of opinion about a ceasefire but, that aside, there is a wide area of commonality.

Our amendment would retain and repeat much of the Scottish Government's motion. There is near universal condemnation of the atrocity that occurred on 7 October. The details that have emerged since the attacks on innocent civilians by Hamas have been horrific: several thousand rockets were launched into Israel, killing at least 1,200 people, and a reported 242 hostages were taken, most of whom remain as hostages at the time of this debate. Operation al-Aqsa Flood, as Hamas termed it, will be forever remembered for the savagery and violence that was inflicted on innocent Israeli men, women and—most grievously—children.

In turning to how people in Scotland reacted to this appalling event, it is important to acknowledge two things. First, I note the comments of Angus Robertson, who became the first Scottish Government minister to publicly and unreservedly condemn the attacks.

Secondly, I applaud the actions of the First Minister, who at a time of acute personal anxiety, given the fact that his family were at that stage trapped in Gaza, visited a synagogue in Giffnock and both prayed and grieved with the families of one of the victims of the Hamas attacks, Bernard Cowan. That will never be forgotten.

It pains me to make this point but, regrettably, those commendable actions contrast with how this institution—the Parliament—reacted, because the Parliament failed to do anything meaningful at that point. The European Parliament, the UK Parliament and countless other legislatures around the world exhibited the Israeli flag in solidarity with the Israeli nation, but we did nothing. We said nothing. We did not even lower a flag. That would not have been about taking sides or being partisan; it would simply have been about acknowledging the devastating and tragic loss of life that resulted from a terrorist attack.

I turn to some other issues. As our amendment notes, we welcome the emergency funding that has been promised by the UK and Scottish Governments to provide vital aid to innocent civilians on the ground. Both those packages will provide essential items and services including food, water and emergency shelter. It is important to note that those aid packages will be spent via trusted partners including United Nations agencies and that the UK Government is explicit in saying that such funding undergoes rigorous oversight.

There is, as I have said, one major political difference between our position and that of the Scottish Government, and that is on the question of demanding an immediate ceasefire. We do not

agree with that. We believe that our position is a mainstream one that is shared by the President of the United States of America and the leadership of the Conservative and Labour parties at the UK level.

Like any sovereign state, Israel has a right to defend itself against terrorists, but every precaution must be taken by the Israeli Government to protect innocent civilians from harm. As the Scottish Government does in the motion, we abhor

“the loss of innocent lives”.

We see, looking back over the last month, that we have all been asked to support the cause for a ceasefire by many different individuals and groups. Most of them are well-intentioned and have the aim, rightly, of ending the violence and encouraging the Israeli Government and the Palestinian authorities to engage in dialogue with each other. We all want peace in the middle east, including for ordinary Israelis and Palestinians, and the only way that that can be possible is through meaningful and respectful dialogue.

However, a ceasefire requires that both opposing sides support it. Regrettably, it has been clear for some time now that Hamas will not respect a ceasefire. Hamas does not even respect the right of Israel to exist, let alone work towards peace. The comments from a senior Hamas official that were aired on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International channel on 24 October were as stark as they were frightening. Ghazi Hamad said:

“We must teach Israel a lesson, and we will do this again and again. The Al-Aqsa Flood is just the first time and there will be a second, a third, a fourth”.

Those are not the words of a group that will settle for peace, but the words of a group that many believe will use a ceasefire to regroup and advance its brutal aim of destroying the state of Israel. That is why we support the right of Israel not just to defend itself but to target Hamas and its resources. In doing so, we also agree that that must be done in accordance with international law. It must be done in a way that ensures that innocent civilians are not deliberately targeted and that does its utmost to minimise civilian casualties.

We recognise that the reality is that Hamas is a terrorist organisation that embeds itself in civilian populations and has positioned itself and its infrastructure in schools, hospitals and residential areas. That has undoubtedly created significant complications and has resulted in loss of innocent life. When that is the approach from the leadership of Hamas, there is no hope that a full and meaningful ceasefire would work, at this stage.

Equally, it is clear that events of 7 October have set back by a significant degree the cause of

achieving a two-state solution. That is why diplomatic interventions from western liberal democracies remain critical, as does the important role that many of the surrounding Arab states will play in defusing tensions.

While the conflict remains on-going, we support the calls for humanitarian pauses. That carries risks, but we believe that it is the most realistic means of ensuring that UK nationals can leave Gaza, that hostages are released and extracted from Gaza, and that humanitarian aid can get into Gaza. The UK Government has consistently called for those things, but they will be achieved only through diplomacy.

It is through many diplomatic efforts by several international actors that the Rafah crossing point was opened, which has allowed humanitarian aid into Gaza, as well as having allowed up to 500 foreign nationals and injured civilians into Egypt. More can and must be done to extend those pauses so that the UN and aid charities can intervene on the ground in order to prevent further loss of life. As I speak, we are awaiting news of whether an agreed truce can take place in relation to hostages and the careful diplomatic efforts that are on-going. If that succeeds, it will, potentially, be a model to follow.

This is a complex and deep-rooted conflict that many of us will never be able to fully comprehend. I acknowledge that the debate will be passionate, but I hope that, in the spirit of the First Minister's comments, there are some things that every member in the chamber can agree on—that Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October was a despicable act of terror, that all hostages who were forcibly taken from Israel into Gaza must be released, that innocent civilians on all sides must be protected, and that aid must reach everyone who needs it.

I hope that we can also agree that the ultimate goal for achieving peace in the middle east is the delivery of a two-state solution that works for Israel and Palestine.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I hope that we can all agree to oppose antisemitism and Islamophobia wherever they present themselves and to stand with our Jewish and Muslim constituents here, in Scotland, at this most difficult of times.

I move amendment S6M-11342.2, to leave out from "further agrees" to end and insert:

"believes in Israel's right to defend itself against terror; supports calls for humanitarian pauses to deliver aid to Gaza safely and in a sustained way; welcomes the UK Government's increased aid contribution of £30 million to Gaza as well as the Scottish Government's aid contribution of £750,000; reiterates its solidarity with Scotland's Jewish, Muslim, Israeli and Palestinian communities and condemns antisemitism, Islamophobia or any other form of hatred, and

reaffirms that a credible, lasting and sustainable peace can only be based on the two-state solution through reinvigorated diplomatic and political efforts in the Middle East Peace Process."

15:12

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): We have all been absolutely horrified by the tragic scenes that we have been seeing on our television screens—the indiscriminate loss of innocent life; innocent young people murdered at a music festival; women and children being taken hostage; children being killed because of rocket fire; and babies dying because their incubators cannot run because of the lack of fuel and electricity. At times, it has felt as if humanity is dying before our very eyes. In these dark times, however, the hope for peace must not end.

Today, Scottish Labour will vote for an immediate ceasefire in the middle east because it is vital that we see a cessation of all violence. I believe that four things need to happen immediately. The first is the end of rocket fire into and out of Gaza. Let me be clear that that means a ceasefire right now.

Secondly, we need the immediate release of all hostages. Thirdly, we need immediate access for humanitarian aid into Gaza, including food, water, electricity, fuel and medical supplies. In my view, the withholding of such vital humanitarian aid is a clear breach of international law. Fourthly, we need a pathway to a peace process, because right now we have no peace and no process.

Those of us who continue to support and call for an immediate ceasefire must recognise the barriers that we must overcome. For a ceasefire to work, all sides must be willing to comply. We must also recognise that Hamas has made it clear that it intends to repeat the 7 October massacre and to continue rocket fire. Tragically, the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has made it clear that he is not willing to even consider a ceasefire. That is why the full force of international diplomacy must be used to create the conditions to make an immediate ceasefire a reality.

It is really important for us to stress that Hamas is not the Palestinian people: it is a terrorist organisation. However, it is also important to stress that the Israeli people are not the right-wing Government of Benjamin Netanyahu, who is, I believe, a man who has no interest in peace.

That is why the political situation on the ground must change if we are to see the realisation of a two-state solution, with an end to illegal occupation, an end to illegal siege and an end to illegal settlements. That is why, throughout the violence that we have seen over the past six weeks, I have been unequivocal in my

condemnation of the barbaric acts of terror by Hamas, and I have been unequivocal that there is no justification for the collective punishment of 2.2 million citizens in Gaza, that I believe that the Israeli Government is in breach of international law, and that peace is possible not with bullets and bombs, but only with a political process that leads to a two-state solution with an end to illegal occupation.

Our amendment calls on the International Criminal Court to investigate the actions of all sides in the conflict because we must stay true to a rules-based international system, and everyone's actions must be judged to make sure that they are in proper accordance with international humanitarian law.

On the amendment in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, we accept the substance of the argument that, ultimately, there is no military solution to the conflict and that peace will come only through a political process.

I want to give some reflections on the situation in Gaza. Back in 2008, I had the very good fortune to visit the Gaza strip long before I was a member elected to the Scottish Parliament. I went on that visit with my good friend Pauline McNeill. I visited the Al-Shifa hospital, which has become such a focus of the conflict in the past few days. We went on a humanitarian mission to deliver a generator to keep the lights and incubators on in the hospital.

What I saw there, back in 2008, has stayed with me and shaped my thinking ever since. I stood around those incubators and saw the life-saving work that was being done, but I also saw incubators that could not work because essential maintenance supplies were not being allowed into Gaza by the Israeli authorities. I remember standing at those incubators and embracing Pauline McNeill as we both sobbed at what we were seeing. I saw the kidney dialysis machines that are now switched off because of the lack of electricity and fuel. That means that the life-saving services that they provide cannot happen.

Fifteen years on, the situation in Gaza has got worse, not better. That is a collective failure—a 15-year failure—of the international community and global leaders and, frankly, it shames the entire world.

When I was in Gaza in 2008, half of the population were able to eat only because of United Nations food programmes. That situation is worse now. A third of the population were unemployed. That is worse now. A third of the essential medicines listed by the World Health Organization were unavailable to the people of Gaza. That is worse now. The light of peace has only dimmed since then.

I hope that, in calling for an immediate ceasefire today, this is not just a moment when the Parliament and those who want peace across the world unite to call for a ceasefire. I hope that it is a game changer in a decades-long conflict, so that we can finally give the people of Palestine and the people of Israel the peace and justice that they so desperately need and so desperately demand.

In closing, it is important to recognise that, although the conflict is in another part of the world, it has caused heightened tensions here at home. Let me be unequivocal and clear: there is no place in our society—whether in a classroom, a college or university campus, a workplace, on our public transport or on our streets—for any form of prejudice or hate. We will stand shoulder to shoulder with our Jewish community in the face of antisemitism, and we will stand shoulder to shoulder with our Muslim community in the face of Islamophobia. We will stand shoulder to shoulder with any community that faces any form of prejudice or hate, because it is only if we see that fight as a fight for all of us that we will see a more equal and more just society at home. Only if we see every life as equal—every Palestinian and Israeli life as equal, and every Jewish, Muslim and Christian life as equal—will we see peace in the middle east and the wider world.

I move amendment S6M-11342.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises that, in order for any ceasefire to work, it requires all sides to comply; is horrified by the Hamas statement that it would repeat the 7 October attacks and continue rocket fire; regrets that Benjamin Netanyahu has stated that he will not even consider a ceasefire; calls, therefore, on the international community to use every form of diplomacy to try and create the conditions on the ground to make a ceasefire a reality; further calls on the International Criminal Court to investigate the conduct of all parties in this conflict, and reaffirms the commitment to a lasting peace and a two-state solution with the end of illegal occupation, siege and settlements.”

15:20

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I thank front-bench members for the consensual tone that they have sought to strike on this important day. I offer the congratulations and thanks of the Liberal Democrats for the safe return of the First Minister's family and express our relief at their reunification.

Having listened to the opening speeches of the First Minister and Anas Sarwar, I believe that their remarks speak to the points that I am about to make. They have captured the spirit of the Liberal Democrat amendment in every way. Where consensus can be found in the Parliament, we should protect it fiercely and allow the Parliament to speak a voice that is as simple, clear and

unified as it can possibly be. For that reason, I am disinclined to move my amendment.

We all want to get to the same point. We may have different routes of getting there or different terminology, nuance or emphasis, but I fundamentally believe that we all want the violence to stop and a peaceful coexistence between the peoples who live side by side in that beleaguered corner of our world. This is about them, not us.

Some will question our locus on the matter, but we do important work here today. It is 45 days since the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October. I want to be crystal clear from the outset that Hamas are terrorists who degraded, kidnapped and murdered hundreds upon hundreds of Israelis, many of them women and children, as well as foreign nationals.

I will never forget the uncensored images that I was shown at a parliamentary briefing hosted by the Israeli embassy in London following those attacks. Scenes of murder and mutilation are now burned into my brain. The butchery and unimaginable cruelty of it must rank among the very worst crimes against humanity, and I recognise no faith or act of worship in the actions of Hamas.

Israel has the right to defend itself and its citizens within the confines of international law, and I am sure that nobody in this chamber could fail to have been moved by the testimony of those families who are still waiting for news of loved ones who have been held captive by Hamas—in particular, those mothers and fathers who are desperate to care for the children who have been taken from them.

I hope that steps towards some kind of deal and some kind of truce will see some hostages released in the coming days, but we should be in no doubt that there will always be a barrier to peace while hostages are detained in Hamas's tunnels or the threat exists that more will be taken.

Hamas has brought a bloody reckoning on the very people in Gaza that it has chosen, in cowardice, to hide behind. Millions of innocent Palestinians living in Gaza now face a humanitarian catastrophe that has shocked the world. I have been struck by the increasing number of Palestinians fleeing the very worst areas of violence who are openly incandescent about what Hamas has done to Gaza and to their lives. It needs to stop—the death and destruction in Israel and in Gaza need to stop. It is essential that hostages are freed immediately and unconditionally, and aid must be allowed to reach those who need it, including fuel.

One can fervently believe in Israel's right to defend itself within the bounds of international law and, at the same time, support the right of the

Palestinian people to self-determination in a country of their own. Those two things are not mutually exclusive. We have lost sight of how that might be possible, but it is not lost to us entirely.

The road to peace seems vanishingly far away right now, but it is a road that we can and must rejoin. Liberal Democrats are clear that a lasting peace and a two-state solution is the only way to guarantee the dignity and security that Palestinians and Israelis deserve and need.

We are also clear that efforts to guarantee the security of Israelis and the self-determination of Palestinians will forever be held back while Hamas rules in Gaza. However, as the death toll of innocent Palestinians continues to rise, it has become increasingly evident that a military solution to eliminate Hamas is not possible; nor is it tenable for Israel to re-occupy the Gaza strip.

The current strategy of the Israeli Government, backed by the US and the UK, is just not working. We need to try something different. We need to move towards a political solution as a matter of urgency. To that end, I urge—the Liberal Democrats urge—the UK Government to make space for one by leading calls for an immediate bilateral ceasefire.

To be clear, that does not mean simply freezing the conflict. That would leave Hamas in place, which would not allow for a future possibility of peace. A ceasefire is clearly needed now to stop the bloodshed and the continued trauma of both Palestinians and Israelis. It is, by definition, temporary and contingent on both parties adhering to it. It is a step towards peace.

However, a ceasefire cannot be a goal in and of itself. It needs to create a window of calm to allow a period of intensive, internationally brokered diplomacy and to pick up the threads of the Oslo peace accords. We are not naive about the difficulties involved in getting to that position, but we must call for it. A cessation in hostilities is required to create the basis for a ceasefire, and we welcome any progress, however small, towards that goal.

That has to be bilateral. Asking just Israel to put down its weapons will not give it assurance against the repetition of the 7 October attacks, which, as the Labour amendment notes, Hamas has actively said that it is keen to perpetrate again. It will not be easy to rid Gaza of Hamas. However, a one-sided ceasefire is not a ceasefire and does not advance us any further along the road to two states.

I reaffirm my party's support for the innocent people at the heart of the conflict, who have been caught up on both sides of it—Israeli and Palestinian. Both peoples have the right to live free from fear. As we vote this afternoon, we must

stand on the side of humanity and peace, not division and hate.

15:26

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The past few weeks have shown us the extent of the lie that every life is equal in this world. The Scottish Greens mourn the loss of every innocent life—Palestinian and Israeli. We condemn every act of terror, whether that is Hamas's evil attack on a music festival or Israel's bombing of a hospital. Terrorism is to be condemned, regardless of who is responsible. Clearly, Hamas is responsible for heinous acts of terrorism; so are the Israeli Government and the extremist Israeli settlers who illegally occupy the west bank. What else should we call the bombing of a school or a hospital, the murder of journalists such as Shireen Abu Akleh, the shooting of Palestinian footballers in the feet or the burning alive of 18-month-old Ali Saeed Dawabsheh in his home?

The conflict did not start on 7 October. The state of Israel was founded by terrorist groups such as the Irgun, predecessor to Netanyahu's Likud party. Its founding is known to Palestinians as the Nakba—the disaster—when 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were ethnically cleansed from their homeland, 500 Palestinian villages were destroyed, and infamous massacres such as that at Deir Yassin took place. For Palestinians, the Nakba was not an event in 1948 but has continued for 75 years.

The idea that the current Israeli assault on Gaza is targeted purely at Hamas is a lie. This week, on live TV, Avi Dichter, former head of Shin Bet and now a Likud minister in the Government, said:

"We are now rolling out the Gaza Nakba."

Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, claimed there are no innocent civilians in Gaza, despite the armed wing of Hamas totalling at most 50,000 men in a civilian population of 2.4 million. Amihai Eliyahu, a minister from the fascist Jewish Power party, suggested dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza. His party leader and national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, lives in an illegal Israeli settlement on stolen Palestinian land in the west bank, has previously been convicted for membership of a terrorist organisation and, for years, hung in his living room a portrait of a terrorist who massacred 29 Palestinian Muslim worshippers.

There are countless other examples, and I raise them to point out that the terrorists are not all on one side. As a proud defender of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, I do not hesitate to condemn the vile terrorism—the evil—of Hamas, so why do so many of Israel's defenders find it impossible to condemn the state terrorism of that Government and of those that have preceded it since 1949?

Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid. That is the verdict of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Israel's own human rights group, Breaking the Silence. The hypocrisy of Western leaders on that has been staggering. The UK, the US, the European Union and others were unequivocal in condemning Russian war crimes, including the targeting of civilian infrastructure and cutting off power and water to civilians. However, in the face of Israel's equally outrageous and equally blatant war crimes, we get silence, equivocation or worse. Keir Starmer defended the criminal act of cutting off water and power to Gaza, and Rishi Sunak told Netanyahu,

"we want you to win."

We know what the Israeli Government thinks victory looks like—it is telling us: the slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent civilians and the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. That victory would be a monumental defeat for the system of international law that the UK was instrumental in establishing after the horrors of the second world war.

The killing must stop—not pause, but stop. What is the purpose of short pauses? To give Gazans a break to drink water that they do not have? To eat some food that do not have? Bodies are piling up in the streets, morgues are full and it is not even safe to bury the dead. There are reports of hundreds of families having been wiped out entirely, with no survivors left to carry their name. Gaza's small Christian community, whose presence in their land goes back to the time of Christ himself, faces total destruction.

Recently, one common response that I have had from Israel's defenders is to bring up the horrible treatment of LGBTQ people by Hamas, as if that obliges me to support the Israeli occupation instead. Often, those responses have gone beyond Hamas into offensive generalisations about the attitude of all Palestinians towards queer people—a position that erases queer Palestinians themselves.

Not only are many Gazans writing their names on their arm to make their bodies easier to identify should they be killed by Israeli air strikes, they are posting what could be their final messages online, so that they can be remembered as more than statistics. LGBTQ Gazans are using the Queering the Map project to do so. I want to share three of those messages now.

The first is:

"I've always imagined you and me sitting out in the sun, hand and hand, free at last. We spoke of all the places we would go if we could. Yet you are gone now. If I had known that bombs raining down on us would take you from me, I would have gladly told the world how I adored you more than anything. I'm sorry I was a coward."

The second is:

"Idk how long I will live so I just want this to be my memory here before I die. I am not going to leave my home, come what may. My biggest regret is not kissing this one guy. He died two days back. We had told how much we like each other and I was too shy to kiss last time. He died in the bombing. I think a big part of me died too. And soon I will be dead. To younus, i will kiss you in heaven."

The third is:

"Pls know despite what the media says there are gay Palestinians. We are here, we are queer. Free Palestine."

There is no liberation for LGBTQ Palestinians when Israeli soldiers are literally raising the rainbow flag over the rubble that they are buried beneath. Genocide cannot be pinkwashed.

I will briefly touch on the amendments before I close. The Greens welcome Labour's amendment. We have also called repeatedly for all sides to be held to account by the ICC. If the Liberal amendment were to be pushed, we would have to abstain on it, because, although it contains that important line about there being "no military solution" and we share the party's contempt for Hamas, there is a contradiction in calling for a bilateral ceasefire and the total removal of one side. It gives Hamas no incentive to agree to that ceasefire.

The conditions for peace are obvious: the unconditional release of all hostages held by Hamas; the release of political prisoners, including children, held by Israel; an end to the 16-year-long Israeli siege of Gaza; Israel withdrawing its illegal settlements and apartheid walls from the occupied West Bank; fresh elections across Palestine; and the right to self-determination for Palestinians and Israelis. A two-state solution may be the most likely outcome of that, but that is for them to decide. We acknowledge the calls from some Israeli peace activists, in particular, for one secular state.

No one is free until everyone is free. Palestinian lives must be equal to those of Israelis or Scots. Scotland has a proud history of standing in solidarity with our Palestinian friends. Today, we will do so again and call for an end to the killing. Today, one message will come from this Parliament: ceasefire now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

15:33

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Six weeks ago, we watched in horror as Hamas terrorists undertook a brutal and unforgiving attack on peaceful and innocent civilians in Israel. We cannot and should not ever shy away from the fact that there is no justification for the barbaric butchering of peaceful citizens. According to Israeli officials, Hamas was responsible for the

death of around 1,400 people on 7 October, and it took around 240 hostages.

It would seem unthinkable for such horrifying events to occur in our own communities. We would rightly look to our Governments to do what they could to protect us. Protection is the primary responsibility of those in charge. Therefore, it is undeniable that Israel has the right to defend itself to protect its citizens. That is not being challenged, and that is not what we are debating today.

However, Israel's military response has now killed more than 13,000 people in Gaza. That is not 13,000 Hamas militants or 13,000 terrorists; it is 13,000 people in Gaza, who have been killed indiscriminately, regardless of who they were. More than a third—an estimated 5,500—were children. Let us pause on that. The military response to the attack that brutally murdered 1,400 innocent people in Israel has now, six weeks later, led to the death of 5,500 children in Gaza. That is roughly the number of children who are born in Glasgow in an entire year. Those who have survived will carry the scars of the horror that they have witnessed for the rest of their lives. That is why we are discussing this. We are not discussing whether Israel has the right to respond, but the response appears to be indiscriminate and might well have broken international law.

The age in which we live, with events being photographed, filmed and uploaded on social media for all to see in a matter of seconds, means that we are all witnesses to what is happening in the middle east. We can see the suffering, the human impact and the scale of destruction in Palestinian communities.

Over the weekend, I know that all of us will have looked on in anguish as more than 30 premature babies were taken off their incubators because the hospital that they were in was unsafe. Sadly, two of the babies died before the remaining 31 were moved to a neonatal unit in Rafah—a dangerous and treacherous journey that was made possible by the bravery of six healthcare workers and 10 staff family members.

It pains us all that so many of the victims in this conflict are those who have never had the chance to truly live, to truly love and to aspire. They have never hated; they did not even know hatred. They have only cried as babies do, and now we cry for them. There can be no justification—none whatsoever—for the death of innocent men, women and children; 2.2 million innocent people cannot pay the price for the actions of Hamas.

I support an unconditional ceasefire. Indeed, I thank members who supported my motion calling for that, and I thank colleagues who lodged their own motions. I support that not because I deny Israel's right to defend itself and its citizens or

because I do not believe that Hamas terrorists should be brought to justice for what they have done, but because the killing of thousands of innocent civilians, the destruction of communities and the seizing of medical centres have not made Israel any safer. Hamas poses a threat to Gaza and Palestinians as well as to Israel and Israelis, but the response has claimed the lives of many thousands of innocent people, and we cannot condone that.

The killing must stop to make way for talking. I know that that is easier said than done, but let those of us in this Parliament join many from across the world, including the United Nations secretary general, in calling for an immediate ceasefire and the unconditional release of hostages. The UK and, more crucially, the United States can play a crucial role in persuading and facilitating diplomacy.

Some colleagues have mentioned a lack of leadership in that regard from the two main UK political parties. For example, the UK Government abstained on a UN resolution calling for a ceasefire, and Scottish Labour and Tory MPs did not support a ceasefire in the House of Commons. Amnesty International described that as a

“missed opportunity for MPs to show they genuinely support the protection of Palestinian and Israeli civilians.”

This is a time for us all to show leadership in the face of this humanitarian catastrophe. The situation cannot continue as it is. Enough earth has been scorched. I ask colleagues from across the chamber to use this opportunity to unite and send a message of peace to world leaders and to those who are enduring untold suffering in the middle east. Nobody is winning here; everybody is losing. If we do not do that, there will be no peace, and hatred for the other side will run deeper and deeper.

Even at home, we have talked of the reported increases in Islamophobia and antisemitism, which shame us all. However, if those of us who have influence exercise it responsibly, enough people on both sides may agree to set down their arms and engage in talks, while bringing justice to those who have committed atrocities and broken international law.

There is a clear public desire for proper political leadership from our politicians, with peaceable protest marches taking place in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, New York and outside the Parliament today. We all want to see peace in the region. I urge colleagues of all parties: be on the right side of history and support the motion.

15:40

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

More than 200 people—Israelis and non-Israelis, babies, women, the elderly, civilians and soldiers—were taken captive by Hamas on 7 October and taken by force to Gaza.

Noga Weiss, 18 years old. Shiri Weiss, 53 years old. Eden Yerushalmi, 24 years old. Ilan Weiss, 56 years old. Judy Weinstein, 70 years old. Elia Toledano, 27 years old. Doron Steinbrecher, 30 years old. Soussana Amit, 40 years old. Almog Sarusi, 26 years old. Ada Sagi, 75 years old. Hila Shoshani, 13 years old. Raaya Rotem, 54 years old. Ofelia Roitman, 77 years old. Noam Or, 17 years old. Alma Or, 13 years old. Dror Or, 48 years old. Liam Or, 18 years old. Nili Margalit, 41 years old. Eliyahu (Churchill) Margalit, 75 years old. Aisha Alziedana, 17 years old. Bilal Alziedana, 21 years old. Hamza Alziedana, 22 years old. Youssef Hamis Alziedana, 53 years old. Sujith Nissanka, 48 years old. Michel Nisenbaum, 59 years old. Tamir Nimrod, 19 years old. Omer Neutra, 22 years old. Shlomo Mansour, 85 years old. Lobanov Alexander, 32 years old. Andrey Kozlov, 27 years old. Dror Kaplun, 68 years old. Maya Goren, 56 years old. Ori Danino, 24 years old. Nimrod Cohen, 19 years old. Sagi Dekel Chen, 35 years old. Rom Braslavski, 19 years old. Gali Berman, 26 years old. Ariel Baruch, 35 years old. Tomer Ahimas, 20 years old. Shani Goren, 29 years old. Jimmy Pacheco, whose age has not even been given. Emily Hand, eight years old. Guy Iluz, 26 years old. Meirav Tal, 53 years old. Yair Yaakov, 59 years old. Yagil Yaakov, 12 years old. Or Yaakov, 16 years old. Sasha Trupanov, 27 years old. Elena Trupanov, 50 years old. Sapir Cohen, 29 years old. Amit Buskila, 28 years old. Yotam Haim, 28 years old. Lior Rudaeff, 61 years old. Yair Horn, 45 years old. Idan Alexander, 19 years old. Arbel Yahod, 28 years old. Dolev Yahod, 35 years old. Eitan Horn, 37 years old. Amit Shani, 16 years old. Ohad Munder, nine years old. Keren Munder, 54 years old. Ruth Munder, 78 years old. Abraham Munder, 78 years old. Kaid Farhan Elkadi, 53 years old. Yarden Roman Gat, 35 years old. Amiram Cooper, 84 years old. Mika Engel, 18 years old. Yuval Engel, 11 years old. Carina Engel-Bert, 51 years old. Ronen Engel, 55 years old. Avigail Idan, three years old. Emilia Aloni, five years old. Ema Konio, three years old. David Konio, 33 years old. Sharon Aloni Konio, 34 years old. Shlomi Ziv, 39 years old. Nave Shoham, eight years old.

I have just spent most of my time reading out some of the many names of hostages taken by Hamas. Some were enjoying time with their friends at a rave when they were taken; others were asleep in their beds. There is a real human cost to the conflict, and it comes back to the names that I have just read out.

I welcome the tone of the debate so far, but it will not necessarily resonate outside. We have already witnessed unsafe protests outside the Parliament and politicians receiving death threats. Recently, my friend and colleague Councillor Thomas Kerr was assaulted in a pub when out with his friends because of his stance on the conflict.

I agree with previous speakers that we must stand shoulder to shoulder against Islamophobia and antisemitism. Communities in Scotland are frightened and we need calm, gentle diplomacy, not just for the safe return of the hostages but for humanitarian breaks to allow vital supplies to get to those who need them most.

I will finish by reading out one name again: Avigail Idan, just three years old. Avigail was kidnapped from her home. Both of her parents were killed. She has her whole life ahead of her without the love and support of her parents, who were cruelly taken before their time. Avigail is in my thoughts today, as are all the innocent people who are caught up in the conflict.

15:47

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Along with others, I put on record my condemnation of the horrific, inhumane terrorist attack on Israelis that was carried out by Hamas on 7 October. The horrors of that day are unimaginable and the continuing nightmare faced by those being held hostage and their loved ones must come to an end. I reiterate calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Since 7 October, inhumane horrors have continued to unfold. Faced with such, I had hoped—and I still hope—that we, as a Parliament, will and can come together in solidarity with one voice to call for an end to such inhumanity. Although the majority of us are in full agreement, it is regrettable that we still find ourselves having to call for a stop to the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza, including women and children, who have been besieged by Israeli forces.

Humanity defines human beings collectively and any collective punishment is an act of inhumanity. We do not get to pick and choose which acts are considered to be humane or inhumane; they are what they are. Therefore, if we condemn one act of inhumanity, we condemn all acts of inhumanity. To do otherwise will simply debase our own humanity.

In the aftermath of the 7 October attacks, the co-ordinator of Government activities in the territories likened the residents of Gaza to human animals, saying:

“animals must be treated as such. There will be no electricity and no water”

in Gaza,

“there will only be destruction. You wanted hell, you will get hell.”

The ordinary people of Gaza did not carry out the horrendous attack and they should not be the ones who are forced to pay the price. Such sentiments and statements must be condemned in the same breath as we condemn the inhuman statements of Hamas and others who call for the destruction of all that is Israel. Without such condemnation, we provide tacit agreement with those statements and embolden those who make them.

Since the 7 October attack, that is exactly what we have seen unfold, with untold death, destruction and destitution continuing unabated. We must ask ourselves what side of humanity we are on and where our conscience leads us.

As MSPs, we have a duty to represent our constituents. Like many others, I have received a number of letters from constituents, calling for me to condemn acts of inhumanity and to support calls for a ceasefire. Summing up, one piece of correspondence ended:

“This issue is above and beyond party politics”.

I can say to that constituent: I hear you, I agree with you, and I, too, lend my voice to calls for a humanitarian ceasefire—now.

It not my voice alone; it is the voice of millions of people across the world, many in Israel and Palestine, of numerous charities and organisations such as Amnesty International and Oxfam, and of the secretary-general of the United Nations.

We have seen before the terrible consequences of international bodies being sidelined and ignored and seeing their authority and power ebb away. We cannot let that happen again. We are already seeing the worrying potential of the conflict escalating beyond Gaza to the wider region and beyond. We must not let that happen. We must support calls for the immediate resumption of talks to facilitate a solution to this 75-year-old Israel-Palestine question: namely a two-state solution, in line with UN resolutions. To achieve that, however, we must reiterate and enforce previous UN resolutions on the issue, for if we allow some of them to be ignored, how can we expect others to be respected? To that end, I believe that a United Nations force of blue helmets needs to be deployed to Gaza, to remain there until a two-state solution is achieved. That may be a hard task, but it is the only way forward. We are not going to stand here, year after year, and continue to have this debate.

The issue that we are debating today is not new. Palestinians have been marginalised and displaced in the west bank and beyond, and that

must stop if we are to reach a place of mutual respect and mutual security—a place where we can build a better future rather than live on in an untenable past built on prejudice and ignorance. Many may see the situation as hopeless, intractable and without solution, but to give up hope is to give up on humanity. I, for one, choose hope. I, for one, choose humanity. I, for one, choose a ceasefire now.

Thank you for listening.

15:52

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I dearly hope that there can be agreement among political parties today to unite behind an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. It is that action that will show the Palestinians that we are watching, that they are not alone and that Scotland will be part of a wider international call. It is a call that recognises the best chance for the release of the Israeli hostages; it recognises, equally, that the world should not forget or forgive the terror attacks on Israelis on 7 October.

I agree with Donald Cameron on one thing—on a few things, actually: that only dialogue will lead to long-term peace, because violence can only breed violence. Today we have heard reports that there may well be a five-day ceasefire—still to be confirmed. I hope that that opportunity, if it arises, will be grasped, because we have witnessed nothing like this human catastrophe in our lives. I certainly have not. The daily unrelenting, indiscriminate enormous firepower, the carpet bombing of hospitals, schools and people's homes, and not least the loss of life, including that of 5,000 children, the inhumane withdrawal of food and water and internet and the deliberate dismantling of the Gaza healthcare system constitute completely disproportionate action. It is a slaughter—a massacre of an entire people who were already under siege. It is a clear breach of international law.

The events of 7 October in Israel are also events that I wholly condemn without reservation, and for which there should be full accountability in the International Criminal Court, but absolutely nothing can justify the response by Israel: the deliberate targeting of civilians, aid workers, journalists, children still trapped and hurt under the rubble, and babies needlessly denied the care that they need in hospitals.

What if it was your child and you cannot get an ambulance or treatment for your child, so you have to watch them die? You cannot even flee from that violence, because you are trapped in the biggest prison in the world, along with 2.3 million other people, who are going through exactly the same as you. Meanwhile, world leaders and the

EU procrastinate about whether they are going to call for a ceasefire.

Today, in one of the many stories that I have read, a surgeon reported that he was left with no choice but to perform an amputation on his own child, and the child died. Children with no surviving parents are one of the biggest phenomena that we are seeing right now. I am clear in my own mind that we are witnessing an attempt to wipe out an entire population.

Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister of Israel, said that it is an "entire nation" that is responsible for the Hamas attacks. The Israeli defence minister, Yoav Gallant, said:

"We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly."

Heritage minister Amichai Eliyahu said that one of the possibilities was to drop a nuclear bomb on Gaza, and that anyone waving a Palestinian or Hamas flag

"shouldn't continue to live on the face of the earth."

However, a United Nations special reporter has warned that the Palestinians are in grave danger of mass ethnic cleansing and that what we are witnessing might well be a repeat of the 1948 Nakba. The powerful speech by Nada Tarbush, the Palestinian observer to the UN for the state of Palestine, quoted Israel's finance minister, who said:

"there's no such thing as the Palestinian people".

In fact, at the same meeting of the UN, the current Prime Minister, Netanyahu, held up a map of the middle east that showed Palestine deleted from the map. The UN reporter also summarised Israel's position as being that all Palestinians in Gaza are

"either terrorists or terrorist sympathizers or human shields".

With some notable exceptions, Israel's current and past leaders have singularly failed to establish a path to peace for the Palestinians in 75 years. As we speak during this period, more than 200 Palestinians have been killed in the occupied west bank, and settlers, who are illegal in the west bank, are being armed with rifles and left free to kill. I am sure that everyone has noticed that that has been happening in the past four weeks.

I have worked with brave former Israel Defense Forces soldiers through Breaking the Silence, an organisation that speaks out. Ariel Bernstein and Benzion Sanders served in the ground incursion into Gaza in 2014. After they fought in that war, they reflected on what they learned. They said that their leaders had lied to them that the conflict could be managed and that there was no need to strive for dialogue with any part of Palestinian society, not even the moderates. I know that to be

true because I was an observer in 2006 and I met Isaac Herzog in the Knesset. Eventually, he said that it is true to say that Mahmoud Abbas and the Fatah moderates were humiliated by the Israeli Government and that the PLO was dismissed over that period. For 30 years, they have been trying to reach peace through a two-state solution.

I have had the privilege of discussing Palestine with world leaders in Qatar, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Tunisia, and I have to say that there has been too much rhetoric and not enough action. I believe with all my heart that the only way for Israel to live within its secure borders and for ordinary Israelis to live in peace, which I want, is for the international community to press Israel to withdraw from the occupation and for there to be a dialogue about an end game that means that there are two sovereign states. That is the only way forward and the only way for peace. I hope that the Scottish Parliament can start on that some time soon. I support the First Minister and the statement that he made earlier, which is to recognise the state of Palestine right now.

15:59

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): On 7 October, the world was shocked by the news of a devastating terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel, where more than 1,000 innocent civilians were killed. Many others were also taken hostage, and it is hard for any of us here to even begin to imagine the impact on those who were affected. Those abhorrent attacks have been condemned—rightly—by members from across the chamber and across Scottish society as a whole. The motion allows us to reiterate that condemnation in the strongest possible terms.

However, the Israeli reaction in the days that followed the attacks has unleashed a humanitarian crisis of shocking proportions on the innocent people of Gaza. The situation on the ground is startling. People along the Gaza strip are in desperate need of water, shelter, food and safety. The numbers of casualties are increasing, tragically, every single day. Even as we debate here today in the comfort of the chamber, the numbers are rising. Statistics reveal, as of just yesterday, that 17,144 people have been killed—7,208 of those being children—33,830 people have been injured, 1.7 million people have been displaced, 253 schools have been damaged and 124 health facilities, including hospitals, have been targeted.

This morning, I was sent the same video that Pauline McNeill referred to—a video of a surgeon in Gaza outside a tent who, it was reported, had to carry out an amputation on his own child without anaesthetic. His child subsequently died of the pain. It is horrendous. What more needs to

happen? This is just appalling. How can we sit back and let this continue? The whole world should be ashamed. The innocent children and people of Gaza are paying the price for Hamas, and it cannot continue.

The World Health Organization has called Israel's forced evacuation of northern Gaza

“a death sentence for the sick and injured”

in the area. The UN goes further in its language and, on its website, it has an article entitled, “Palestine: Preventing a Genocide in Gaza and a New ‘Nakba’”. That sort of language should make us all sit up and think about what history will tell us of the days that we are living through and how Governments, countries and individuals responded to them.

The collective punishment that is being imposed on innocent civilians can never be justified and will undeniably make any future peace process in the region more difficult. That is why there must be an immediate ceasefire. That should not be a complicated demand to make. As well as by the UN, a ceasefire is already backed by ActionAid, Oxfam, Amnesty International, Stop the War, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Doctors Without Borders and many other organisations.

This is human suffering in the extreme, and it is happening in front of us in 2023. We cannot simply do or say nothing. We must stand up for these people. We cannot stay silent when we have voices. I truly believe that there should be no politician anywhere who is not willing to call for and vote for a ceasefire. A ceasefire is the only way for the immediate safety of all people across the region and to allow for the hostages to be released and the much-needed humanitarian aid to reach civilians who have been so drastically affected by the conflict.

I therefore urge the Government of Israel to end the total siege of Gaza and to ensure unbound humanitarian access, including the delivery of sufficient amounts of medical supplies, food, fuel and water. I urge Hamas to begin the immediate, unconditional release of all hostages held captive. The delivery of aid and the release of hostages can only be achieved with the complete cessation of hostilities.

Of course, the situation is not new, with Holocaust survivor Dr Gabor Maté, for example, previously referring to Gaza as the “world's largest outdoor prison”. The international community must now come together and find a two-state solution to bring lasting peace to the region.

Closer to home, it is great that the Scottish Government has pledged £750,000 to assist the relief efforts in Gaza via the United Nations Relief

and Works Agency's flash appeal, which I wholeheartedly welcome.

I say to any of my constituents in Coatbridge and Chryston who are also members of the Israeli or Palestinian communities that I affirm the right of all Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security, and I always will. There is no place for antisemitism, Islamophobia or any kind of hatred here in Scotland. That message has been given consistently by our First Minister throughout the past few weeks. He has led from the front in calling for peace for all and an immediate ceasefire, often when he has been facing difficult personal circumstances. I am incredibly proud of his international leadership through this time. It is what other leaders across the UK should be aspiring to.

To any commentators who still think that we should not be debating this, I simply ask why this Parliament would not debate what may be the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time. Why would we not give our voices to those who are oppressed and suffering? This is not about taking sides in what is obviously a complex situation; it is about human rights and our basic humanity.

I will end by again quoting the words of Holocaust survivor—and I will try to pronounce his name better for the *Official Report*—Dr Gabor Maté, whom I mentioned earlier, who said, in a widely shared video on the situation in the middle east that many have probably already viewed:

“You don't have to support Hamas policies to stand up for Palestinian rights, that's a complete falsity ... So it's not a question of being pro-Palestinian. It's a question of, are you in favour of justice and liberty, and freedom and truth, or are you not?”

There must be an immediate ceasefire, and I hope that everyone here will vote for that this evening.

16:05

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): As a doctor and as the father of two young children, I am deeply shocked by the suffering of all innocents caught up in the violent chaos engulfing Israel and the Palestinian territories. Israelis, Palestinians and nationals of 25 other countries, including many non-combatants and children, are all victims, some at the hands of the Hamas-led terrorists whose barbaric murders, rapes and abductions ignited this chapter of violence, while others have been killed or wounded by missiles or caught in the crossfire as they fled or sought refuge. As we now know, some places of sanctuary, including hospitals, have been perfidiously used by terrorists as cover for their operations.

Israel suffered a horrendous terror attack at the hands of Hamas, and Palestinian civilians in Gaza are experiencing untold misery. I am sure that I am not alone here in saying that the human toll weighs heavily on my conscience. It is a challenge to balance my professional responsibilities with my parental instincts. There is clearly an urgent need for international efforts to find peaceful resolutions, to protect innocent lives—be they Palestinian or Israeli—and to secure the release of Israeli and third-country hostages.

I use the word “resolutions” in the plural because we need a series of measures to create a pathway that will deliver a sustainable ceasefire. The call for an immediate ceasefire is, I fear, setting ourselves up to fail. I say that because Hamas is a proxy terrorist organisation, sponsored by malign actors in the region and bent on the obliteration of Israel and the killing of all Jews. I cannot see a sustainable peace being made with such an organisation.

Another way has been proposed. There is a proposal to begin with a pause in the fighting—some might say a truce—to establish additional corridors for humanitarian relief, to get essential aid into Gaza and to secure safe passage and safe havens for non-combatants. We should be mindful of, and respect, the fact that negotiations, with the aim of releasing hostages and pausing military action, are currently on-going in the region and are at a highly sensitive stage. We have heard within the past hour that the Israeli Prime Minister will meet with his cabinet basically now, in the light of developments related to the release of abductees. That is the situation as we know it right now.

Step by step, that situation can move. It must move to a peace that can last. By using the diplomatic and financial muscle of the international community, we must then reinvigorate the middle east peace process and realise the goal of a two-state solution, in which a safe and secure Israel lives alongside a viable Palestinian state.

Underpinned by regional economic development and integration, as well as by people-to-people exchanges, Israel and other countries in the wider region have already demonstrated that that is possible.

The Abraham accords provided a proof of concept, with Israel normalising relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, as well as with Morocco and Sudan, delivering wide-reaching economic benefits. Let us not forget that Israel and Saudi Arabia were also very close to normalising relations before Hamas launched its murderous attacks on 7 October. Nobody should be allowed to stop that wide peace occurring. It is incumbent upon all of us to pursue that peace. For Palestinians and Israelis, pursuing peace would

deliver the conditions for economic growth, good jobs, housing, healthcare for all, prospects, and the promise of a prosperous future in which the region's children and young adults could grow up. However, first, we need to achieve a sustainable ceasefire respected by all parties.

Although the Scottish Conservatives have lodged an amendment to the Scottish Government's motion, our positions across the chamber are actually very close. It is important to underscore that we stand in solidarity with people of all faiths. We condemn antisemitism and Islamophobia. I feel that we must also be clear that supporters of terrorist organisations that threaten to do us harm have no place in a multifaith, socially tolerant, democratic Scotland. Those are matters of importance to life in Scotland and to the people of Scotland. I fully understand that the Israel-Hamas conflict elicits intense emotions and strong opinions.

The crisis demands international leadership following the news that has come out of the region in the past hour. I hope that we will see the release of hostages and the pause that we all want.

16:11

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I associate myself with many remarks that have been made by members from across the chamber. I agree with many of the points that have been made and will try not to repeat too many.

Of course, I agree with the terms of the First Minister's motion. I also agree with the amendment that has been lodged by the Labour Party. Pauline McNeill, in particular, spoke very forcefully. I pay testament to her long experience in these matters—as I pay tribute to our former colleague, Sandra White, who is sitting in the gallery.

One thing that I must repeat is that the attacks that were carried out on 7 October were beyond words and should be condemned. I am confident that all members of the Scottish Parliament will join together to condemn those horrific attacks. There is nothing that could justify the brutality that we paid witness to on that day.

I also want to say that I think that it is entirely right that members of this Parliament are discussing the issue. That decision has been attacked, as have the demonstrations and various activities around the country, based on the assumption that we are not going to make any difference anyway. That is a counsel of despair. It is extremely important that demonstrations have been held and that people have been writing letters and making their voices known. I do not

believe that diplomats and the people around the world who have the ability to change the situation are immune to hearing from populations about how abhorrent we believe what is currently happening actually is. It is entirely right that the Scottish Parliament discuss, debate and decide on the motion.

It is currently believed that between 11,000 and—as Kaukab Stewart said—13,000 Gazans have been killed since 7 October. That is according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. I appreciate that sources are very difficult to verify, but those statistics have been independently verified by the UN, which at present has not cast any significant doubt on either of those figures.

We can also look to specific attacks as examples of what has been referred to by some members as the “disproportionate” nature of the response, such as the successive attacks on the Jabalia refugee camp in the north of the Gaza strip. There has been a wide range of reports on the exact number of casualties from the attacks on that camp over the past few weeks, but we know for certain that the number of Palestinian refugees who have been injured is in the hundreds and that dozens—possibly far more than that—have been killed.

I am told that those attacks have been justified by it being said that the attacks were targeting one particular Hamas commander. One cannot justify the murder of dozens, maybe hundreds, of people in order to attack one person. As the First Minister said, and as international law upholds, collateral damage is not an acceptable way of dealing with such things.

There is a vital distinction between those of us on one side of the chamber, who largely agree, and the Conservative position—although I agree with all the areas of concern that Donald Cameron listed towards the end of his speech. However, the main point of disagreement is on an immediate ceasefire. I think that I heard Sandesh Gulhane say that he could not call for a ceasefire, but thinks that there should be a ceasefire that everyone should adhere to. The reason, as I understand it, that is now being given for not calling for a ceasefire is that Hamas said it would not observe it. Why should we be intimidated by terrorists into not calling for a ceasefire? If Edward Mountain was here, I am sure that he would agree that it is quite often the case that, when two military forces oppose each other, it can be in people's interests to have a ceasefire—

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: If I can just finish making this point, I will give way to Jackson Carlaw.

When both sides agree to a ceasefire, it can often be the case that one side gains an advantage. I understand that point, but in this case we are talking about civilians—innocent people—being caught between two military forces. That is why there should be an immediate ceasefire.

Jackson Carlaw: I think that the answer to Mr Brown's point is that, given that Hamas has said that it will not observe a ceasefire, there is a belief by Israel that today's motion, when passed, and the campaign for a ceasefire will be meant to lead to a unilateral ceasefire by Israel. It will be held to the standard of unilaterally ceasing fire, notwithstanding the fact that the other side will not. That issue is at the heart of all this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I can give you the time back.

Keith Brown: If what Jackson Carlaw suggests is the case, why would that stop us calling for an immediate ceasefire? I understand the point that he makes. I think that Anas Sarwar made points about statements from Benjamin Netanyahu that cast doubt on whether he is keen on a ceasefire, as well. That should not stop us from saying that this is wrong, that the people who are being killed just now are innocent people and that it should stop. It should not be conditional—it should stop now. Of course, I also believe that the hostages should be returned immediately: that is only right.

There is not a war in history that I can bring to mind that has not ended with a treaty.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The point that I wanted to make to Dr Gulhane, if he had given way, was that, regrettably, what the Conservative amendment would delete from the motion is the line that says

"that the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza, including women and children who have been besieged by Israeli forces, must stop".

It is regrettable that the Conservatives would delete that from the motion. Does Keith Brown agree that everyone in here, on behalf of ourselves and the people of Scotland, should be able to say, "Stop the killing of innocent civilians right now"?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, I can give you the time back.

Keith Brown: I agree with that point. It would be very powerful if this Parliament were to agree and say with one voice that, regardless of our doubts about the good faith of either side, we think that there should be an immediate ceasefire to save the lives that Monica Lennon talked about.

I can tell that much of my time has gone. I want to make one more point in particular, which is that one thing that can come out of this situation is a

genuine attempt to achieve a two-state solution, so that both Israel and Palestine can live in peace and security. The failures to do that over many years have been laid out by Pauline McNeill and others. The current situation has to be a prompt to renew, with real vigour and serious intent, the efforts to achieve that solution.

One thing that I will say is that we can, if we support the motion and stand united, make a very powerful statement today. We stand for peace. I am quite fond of quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher, who said that peace "is found also in dungeons".

It is also true that peace is found in graveyards.

The point is that we cannot have a peaceful solution until Palestine is both free and secure, and is not a dungeon, not an imprisoned place and not an occupied place, and the people there—as for the people in Israel—can be free from the threat of being attacked by bombs, rockets and bullets.

We can unite around the fact that we want that to happen and to be made the focus beyond the ceasefire, which will, if we can achieve it—I know that this Parliament cannot—save countless lives and prevent countless injuries.

We have heard horrendous anecdotes about people without parents, without limbs and so on. We can stop that, and then agree to move on and encourage all those involved to move towards a real peace for the people of Palestine and the people of Israel.

I support the motion in the name of the First Minister.

16:19

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I am glad that we have this opportunity to properly debate and vote on one of the most critical issues facing the world today—an issue that, for millions of people, is a daily horror that is lived out over and over again. As others have said, it is right that we, as elected members of the Scottish Parliament, add our voices to the overwhelming majority of aid agencies, human rights organisations and Parliaments across the world that have condemned the violence and seek an immediate ceasefire.

I have searched my soul: I now ask those who have continued to refuse calls for a ceasefire to do the same. Is there a number of dead children that we will accept before something is done? Are more babies to die through lack of clean water and fuel? Is there a number of sick and injured people being left to die due to lack of treatment whose

deaths we are happy to cast off as a consequence of war?

Pauses are not enough; there is nothing humanitarian about a pause in these dire times. A pause in the fighting might save lives, but let us be clear that all the aid agencies on the ground agree that a pause suggests that bombardment can resume and carry on once people are fed and have had some water. A pause is no good for people who are fearing imminent death.

I have asked myself so many times why there is, among those who are in power, such indifference to a country that is quite literally being erased as we look on. The rhetoric from the UK Government does not represent the view of ordinary people. In ignoring the extent of this human tragedy, Sunak is not living up to his responsibilities.

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): Over the weekend, António Guterres, the UN's secretary general, said:

"The war in the Middle East is having a staggering and unacceptable number of ... casualties, including women and children, every day. This must stop. I reiterate my call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire."

Will Carole Mochan join me in imploring all our colleagues—every member across the chamber—to agree with the call from the UN secretary, so that this Parliament can unite in peace and humanity?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back for the intervention, Ms Mochan.

Carol Mochan: I thank the minister for her intervention. Scottish Labour has been very clear that we support an immediate ceasefire.

This is one of the darkest and most devastating events in recent history. Children are dying in Gaza—one child every 10 minutes. Mothers are giving birth with no pain relief and families are being torn apart, yet those who might have some influence and some power to intervene appear—inexplicably—to be unwilling to do so. In the west, we like to tell ourselves that we have some sort of moral leadership to offer the world. Where is that now? Why can we not find it in this time of need?

Israel has the right to respond and ensure the release of all hostages following the horrific attacks by Hamas on 7 October, which I condemn. The actions were callous and have led to the needless loss of innocent lives. The action that we have seen since has been disproportionate. Self-defence is not dropping tonnes of bombs on residential areas, striking hospitals, indiscriminately killing children or withholding medicine and aid from people who are in desperate need. That is not self-defence; it is illegal, it is inhumane—plain and simple—and it

must stop. An immediate ceasefire is required, so I am pleased that Labour's amendment calls on the international community to work tirelessly to create the conditions to make that a reality.

I add my voice to the call in the Labour amendment for those who are responsible for flagrant breaches of international law on both sides to be held to account. Governments cannot hide behind the "fog of war" excuse. There has been almost no consideration for civilian life, and Governments should not and must not escape international justice.

The calls for an immediate ceasefire are crucial and they are right. Beyond that, we need to recognise the severe and brutal challenges that Palestinians have faced on a daily basis—challenges that existed long before the escalation of this conflict. Palestinians in Gaza have lived for many years in what amounts to an open-air prison. They have limited freedoms and those that they have are entirely at the behest of the Israeli Government. Many Palestinians have only ever lived under occupation.

The fact that Israel has simply been allowed to continue to settle areas of the west bank and Gaza has resulted in systematic human rights violations against Palestinians, and led to decades of degrading and dehumanising treatment. In all that we do, we must recognise that. That will help to create the conditions that provide an opportunity for dialogue and negotiation to address the root causes of the conflict, and to work towards a sustainable and just resolution.

From the start of the conflict until this very day, I have called for an immediate ceasefire and a serious negotiation to secure peace. I still make that call today, and I, alongside my party, will support the Government's motion. I call for an immediate ceasefire to save innocent lives.

16:25

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I welcome the Parliament's having the opportunity to debate and vote on this critical matter.

There are people who say that whatever we say or however we vote today will have no impact. I believe that that is not the case. Words matter. The Parliament matters, what the Scottish Government says matters, and what the UK Government and the official UK Opposition say and do matters. International diplomacy and international pressure matter. No country exists in a vacuum, particularly one that is so heavily dependent on international support and funds.

We condemn the Hamas terrorist attacks of 7 October—we all agree on that—and we call for the release of hostages. However, we also condemn

the slaughter that continues in Gaza on a daily basis. We condemn the breaking of international law; the collective punishment; the withholding of water, food, fuel and electricity; the bombing of hospitals, schools and ambulances; and the forced displacement of a civilian population. It would take more than six hours to read out the names of all those who have been killed so far.

Make no mistake: those are war crimes. Those who perpetrate those crimes are guilty, and those who enable them and commentators who apologise for them are culpable. People need to stop convincing themselves that Palestinian lives somehow do not matter.

Let us be clear on the legal position. The commission by one party to a conflict, including an armed group, of serious violations of international humanitarian law does not justify their commission by another party.

We also condemn what has been happening on the west bank, where settler violence continues. More than 300 Palestinians have been killed so far this year, most of them prior to 7 October. That gives the lie to those who argue that Israeli violence has been only in response to the events of that day. Make no mistake: violence against Palestinians, the stealing of their land, ethnic cleansing and illegal occupation did not start on 7 October. That is a deliberate policy that has gone on for over 75 years.

Ross Greer rightly highlighted the activities of the Irgun Jewish terrorist militia—its killing of civilians, the bombing of the King David hotel and many other incidents. Unfortunately, terrorism in that part of the world is not new.

Much has been said—rightly—about the need for community cohesion in Scotland and the need to call out antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism in all their forms. That is of critical importance. We need to listen to all voices from those communities and recognise that those communities are not monolithic blocs but contain people with diverse opinions.

I was proud to join many thousands of protesters in Glasgow at the weekend to call for an immediate ceasefire. I was especially moved to hear Gordon Maloney and Haim Bresheeth speaking at the march. Scottish-Jewish Israelis supported the call for a ceasefire and criticised the actions of the far-right Netanyahu Government and its murderous policies, which are not only immoral but ineffective in making Israelis safe.

My colleague Anum Qaisar MP has organised an online meeting on Thursday this week with Breaking the Silence, which is an organisation of ex-IDF members opposed to the occupation of Palestine—Pauline McNeill has already

referenced it. I encourage members to join that event.

I commend the work of the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, which I met in Jerusalem in 2018, and the work of the many young American Jewish activists whom I met in villages on the west bank on that visit and who supported Palestinians facing daily attacks from settlers backed by the Israeli army. I also commend the Jewish voices who are no longer with us but deserve and need to be heard.

The Labour MP Gerald Kaufman spoke in a debate in the House of Commons during an earlier Israeli assault on Gaza—there have been many such assaults. He said:

“My grandmother was ill in bed when the Nazis came to her home town of Staszow. A German soldier shot her dead in her bed.

My grandmother did not die to provide cover for Israeli soldiers murdering Palestinian grandmothers in Gaza.”—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 15 January 2009; Vol 486, c 407.]*

Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, said:

“To be Jewish means always being on the side of the oppressed and never the oppressor”,

and Dutch Holocaust survivor and theoretical physicist Hajo Meyer said, “Never again, for anyone.”

Their humanity stands in stark contrast to the words of the Israeli Minister of Defence, who said that the Israeli army is

“fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly”

and that its plan is to “eliminate everything”.

The reality is that there is no military or security solution to the conflict. Earlier military incursions into Gaza have failed to deliver peace. The events of 7 October were horrific and unjustified, but they were also undeniably a failure of Israeli military intelligence and security.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The member makes an important point. Does he recognise that it is strategically counterproductive to further entrench disproportionate violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, because it undermines the effort of the more moderate Palestinian Authority to build a peaceful and secure relationship and a two-state solution?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ivan McKee, I can give you the time back.

Ivan McKee: I agree whole-heartedly with Paul Sweeney on that point; the actions of the Israeli Government are, indeed, counterproductive.

In conclusion, instead of genocide or the ethnic cleansing of 5.5 million people—the equivalent of

the entire population of Scotland—there must be a negotiated solution. We cling to the language of the two-state solution, but the reality of the facts on the ground, which have been created by illegal settlements over the 30 years since the Oslo accords, makes that increasingly difficult.

The alternative—a single state with equal rights for all and the right of return for Palestinians and Jews alike—may seem an impossibility in today's climate, but the history of global conflict is littered with impossibilities becoming true. We remember the impossible situation in the 1980s with apartheid South Africa—we expected it to be there forever.

This inhumane siege of Gaza can be ended. Hostages can be released. Gaza can be rebuilt. The apartheid system in the west bank can be ended. All people—Israelis and Palestinians—between the river and the sea can live in peaceful liberty, but, for that to happen, our voices and the voices of millions of others need to be heard. Tolerance of the intolerable needs to end. Turning a blind eye to the enabling of war crimes needs to stop. Our voices and the voices of the millions around the world who are calling for a ceasefire now need to be heard.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. There is a little time in hand.

16:32

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): The subject of today's debate is one of the most challenging and complex issues that we have ever discussed in the Parliament. I agree profoundly with what former US President Barack Obama recently said about the conflict:

"If there's any chance of us being able to act constructively to do something, it will require an admission of complexity and maintaining what on the surface may seem contradictory ideas that what Hamas did was horrific, and there's no justification for it and ... that the occupation and what's happening to Palestinians is unbearable".

He went on:

"If you genuinely want to change this ... you've got to figure out how to speak to somebody on the other side and listen to them and understand what they are talking about."

There has been recognition in the debate from members across the chamber of how difficult but also how important that is, and the consensual tone of today's debate has reflected that; we have heard passionate and excellent contributions on what is, for good reason, a highly emotive issue.

That tone was set by the First Minister, Donald Cameron, Anas Sarwar and Alex Cole-Hamilton in opening the debate. There was not a single intervention in the first hour and 20 minutes of the debate—that is an observation, not a criticism. It was important that the interventions that were

made were listened to, but the fact that there were so few speaks to a debate in which we have recognised the challenging situation and the need to listen respectfully to one another.

As members have said, the events of 7 October were a horrific and barbaric act of terror that can never be justified. Rightly, there has been unequivocal condemnation of Hamas from members across parties. It is a terrorist organisation and is avowedly antisemitic and genocidal. As Alex Cole-Hamilton expressed, the images that were provided by the Israeli embassy are scenes that I wish that I had never seen.

As the First Minister said in his opening speech, we must be unequivocal that, like any other state, Israel has the right to defend itself and its people, not least from indiscriminate terrorist attack. Israel also has a justifiable fear that such an attack could happen again—not least in the face of Hamas's recent appalling comments that it would repeat the systematic slaughter that was carried out six weeks ago until Israel is exterminated. That appalling statement is condemned in the Labour amendment, which I urge all members to support.

However, also like any other state, Israel has the responsibility to exercise restraint and proportion in its response to those atrocities. We would expect that of the British Government and our armed forces; we should expect it of Israel, too.

As Carol Mochan and others have said, there is a responsibility to act in accordance with international law. The ICC chief prosecutor has been clear that alleged war crimes by Israelis on Palestinian territory, and by Palestinians on Israeli territory, are within the jurisdiction of its on-going Palestine investigation.

The Israeli Government's actions in relation to the killing of so many innocent Palestinians, and the cutting off of food, fuel and water supplies, have, rightly, been condemned. The Palestinian people are not Hamas, and Hamas is not the Palestinian people. As Pauline McNeill powerfully articulated, what is happening right now in Gaza is a humanitarian catastrophe. The deaths of innocent civilians and the images that are coming out of Gaza are equally heartbreaking.

That is why we need an immediate ceasefire. We need to recognise that the only possible way of realising the hope of peace is by recognising that every life is equal. For a ceasefire to happen, however, we need the immediate release of hostages, as is stated in the First Minister's motion. We heard the names of so many hostages, which were read out powerfully by Meghan Gallacher. We also need immediate access into the Gaza strip of humanitarian aid such as water, food, medicine and fuel.

However, as Anas Sarwar said, we must recognise that a ceasefire is possible only if both sides are willing to comply. Benjamin Netanyahu has made it clear that he will not support a ceasefire, and Hamas is committed to continuing rocket fire and to repeating the attacks of 7 October. We therefore have to use every form of diplomacy with international partners to change conditions on the ground in order to make a ceasefire a reality.

When Donald Dewar opened the Parliament, he said that it was

“about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are, how we carry ourselves.”

As Fulton MacGregor, Keith Brown and Ivan McKee said, we can and should debate global issues—in particular, an issue that affects so many people who live here, as well as those who live in the middle east. However, we should carry ourselves in a way that does not see such a complex issue through our domestic politics or seek to take political advantage. That has almost entirely been the case today, which is to the credit of members—in particular, members such as Bill Kidd, who was right to say that the issue is above party politics.

The Parliament works best when we work together. We have broad agreement on a number of issues today: on the unequivocal condemnation of Hamas; on the need for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages; on the senseless tragedy of the loss of so many innocent lives; on the right of all Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security; and on the need for the Scottish and UK Governments to provide humanitarian aid and for that aid to reach those who need it without hindrance from any side.

In addition, members such as Donald Cameron have rightly recognised the hurt and anger that are felt by Jewish and Muslim people in Scotland—in particular, by those who have lost loved ones. Certain communities are fearful of an increase in Islamophobia and antisemitic hate crimes. We stand with our Jewish and Muslim communities—with all communities—against hate. This feels like an incredibly bleak time, and it is. The journalist Matt Frei has talked about how, in this dark period, there are still “embers of hope”. We must rekindle those embers of hope.

As we debate this issue, we hope that meaningful discussions can result in the release of hostages and a ceasefire. From this tragedy, we must seek not only a cessation of the current violence but a renewed emphasis on peace and on a two-state solution, with a safe and secure Israel, alongside a viable Palestinian state, that is based on existing UN resolutions, and a region in which everybody is able to live in peace, and in

the dignity and security that everyone deserves and that so many of us here take for granted.

16:40

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I must say that I approached today's debate with a tremendous sense of trepidation. I have been overwhelmed with emotion since the events on 7 October. Yes, it is true that I represent Eastwood and that half of Scotland's Jewish population live in my constituency. However, I have an equally large Muslim population, a Sikh population, a growing Hindu population and constituents who are of no faith at all. I represent them all. Yes, I feel a special duty to the Jewish community, because few members have that population or that immediate contact and understanding, and I feel a need to speak up and represent their voice.

I took enormous encouragement from my political opponents, particularly the First Minister and Anas Sarwar, whom I respect and admire and, indeed, have an affection for. I admire the way in which they have risen to the top of their parties and, in one case, to the top of Government. When we first discussed the events in question in their immediate aftermath, I said that I had not seen the First Minister be more impressive, and I continue to believe that. I admire the way in which he approached this afternoon's debate. In fact, I do not know that I disagreed with any of what he had to say except his final conclusion. I tried to answer the question, “What does a ceasefire mean?” when I intervened on Mr Brown. In some ways, it is an easy question to answer, but for me it is more complicated.

This summer, I read what I still think is the book of the year: “Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad: A Family Memoir of Miraculous Survival” by Danny Finkelstein. I was stopped by the foreword, even before I got to the main part of book. The author is the same age as me, and he articulated my sentiments exactly when he said that, for all of his lifetime, we have said, “Never again” in relation to the Holocaust but that, for the first time in his lifetime, although he did not think that it was probable that it could happen again, he thought that it was suddenly possible that it could happen again.

That summed up my fear as well. All the optimism that I had when the Berlin wall came down and when the peace in Northern Ireland was achieved has, in many respects, evaporated. The last time there was real hope for Israel was when the Oslo accord was agreed by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat and the PLO, with the involvement of Bill Clinton. It is a tragedy that we did not build on that. I will come back to that, because the Palestinian people have been betrayed and let down in so many different ways in the decades

since, and in the centuries and millennia before that.

On that day of 7 October, as the First Minister said, more Jews were killed—murdered—than on any single day since the Holocaust. I do not know whether the chamber fully understands the trauma to the entire population of the state of Israel. There is not anyone in Israel who does not know somebody who was murdered on that date. Those of us—Neil Bibby referred to it—who have seen the bodycam footage recovered from the people who committed those acts will have seen the bestiality and the defilement of the corpses.

Ivan McKee: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackson Carlaw: In a moment.

Therefore, people should understand that, to me, this is not about Palestine and Israel so much as it is about Hamas and Jews, and about the absolute resolve of that terrorist group, harboured within Gaza, on which so much is now being visited, and what it inflicted on the people of Israel on that day. That is what manifestly moves so many people of Jewish faith wherever they happen to live.

Yet, in the face of that—I will touch on this before returning to the substance of the debate—the Senior Rabbi of Scotland, Moshe Rubin, talked about his conversations with Arabs and people of other faiths at a reception last week with Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal and the hope that comes from that.

As I have said, the Chief Rabbi, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, came to my constituency to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Calderwood Lodge primary school, which is the subject of my members' business debate tomorrow. His engagement under the leadership of His Majesty the King has been clear, with similar interfaith conversations taking place across the rest of the United Kingdom. We must pray, hope and toil to ensure that this conflict is not visited on our communities here. That must be the one thing that we can influence and determine as an outcome.

A week last Saturday, quite by accident, I walked right into the march on Buchanan Street. I had been out for lunch and was dressed in green and black. I bumped into a very close Muslim friend—in fact, he is the son of someone to whom I am also very close—and he said, "Jackson, you're in the wrong colours. What are you doing?" However, when I stood there and watched the faces of those marching and the families, I saw not a campaign against Israel but a campaign for Palestine and for justice for the people of Palestine. As I said, they have been betrayed. They have been let down by broken promises internationally. There have been collapsed hopes,

violent belligerence and a failure to negotiate. Since the 1990s, they have lived in hope but, in reality, the international movement has not acted collectively to resolve the difficulties. However, absent were placards that might help—placards that said, "Release the hostages" or "Expel Hamas". Those are the conditions that need to be met for us to at least get to the first stage of moving forward.

If, for 20 years or so, international politics has been defined by the events of 9/11, I fear that, for the rest of my lifetime and for the next 30 years, international politics will be defined by the events of 7 October, Israel's response and the trauma that has been visited on Gaza since then. That would be a tragedy, but if I am being pragmatic and realistic, I do not think that there is an atmosphere in which we can expect meaningful progress to be made. That is the biggest tragedy of all. Yes, I hope that, collectively, we can join international voices to work to overcome that atmosphere, but it stands as the greatest obstacle to progress.

Can I support the motion? There is so much on which we agree, and there have been so many speeches with which I have agreed. There have even been things said by those who have been fiercely critical of Israel that I can understand and respect. Do I apologise for everything that Israel has done? No, I do not. Do I apologise for everything that Israel has done over the past 30 to 50 years? No, I do not.

However, right now, a unilateral ceasefire by Israel, which is, I fear, the practical consequence of the motion, will not lead to a reciprocal move by Hamas but will allow it to consolidate and do exactly what members have said during the debate, which is to carry on the campaign of violence against Jews, as it has promised it will. It is that difficulty that causes me to hesitate, even though I feel overwhelmed by and somewhat inadequate to the debate in which I am participating.

I thank all those members who have taken part in the debate. As I said, it has been deeply emotional and deeply troubling. Finally, let me say that I know that my Jewish constituents feel the pain, suffering and loss of everybody in Gaza equally. They have said that. They breathe it. They live it. It unites us all. It is such a difficult debate, and I thank all those who have contributed to it.

16:49

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): It is an honour to close the debate in support of the motion that was lodged by the First Minister. On behalf of the Scottish Government, I

accept the amendment by the Scottish Labour Party.

I begin by welcoming the widespread consensus that we have heard so much about this afternoon. Donald Cameron was absolutely right to pay tribute to the First Minister's measured and eloquent speech. I am sure that I speak for all when I say that we were delighted by the news of the return of his mother-in-law and father-in-law, who have been able to return from Gaza.

I also reflect on the specific consensus that we have heard from the front benches and across the chamber in condemning Hamas and its atrocities and hostage taking. There has been a welcome for emergency funding from the Scottish Government and the UK Government. There has been condemnation from all sides of the loss of civilian life. There has been support from all sides for a two-state solution. There has been opposition from all sides to antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Anas Sarwar was absolutely right to call for a ceasefire today, just as it was right to do so last week, the week before that and, indeed, last month, which is when the United Nations first called for one. Alex Cole-Hamilton was absolutely right to promote consensus where we can, and Ross Greer was absolutely right to stress that all human life is equal.

We have heard some very powerful speeches this afternoon. We have heard from Kaukab Stewart and Meghan Gallacher. Who could not be moved in hearing the names of Israeli victims taken hostage? It took Meghan Gallacher five minutes to read the names of 87 of the 240 hostages, all of them loved and missed. She did not have time but, if she had, it would have taken her four and a half hours to read the 5,500 names of dead Palestinian children.

We also heard very powerful speeches from Bill Kidd and Pauline McNeill, to whom I pay tribute. We go back a long way, Pauline McNeill and I, back to our National Union of Students days. She was on this issue then, as she is now, and she was absolutely right in everything that she said. She talked about a physician performing an amputation on his own child. What she did not mention was that he did it without being able to use an anaesthetic. That is unimaginable. His child then died. It is unimaginable.

We heard powerful speeches from Fulton MacGregor and Keith Brown, who made a compelling case for a ceasefire. That was a compelling case that could have been made only by somebody with military experience, as he has, as a former Royal Marine. We heard powerful speeches from Carol Mochan and from Ivan McKee, who quoted Holocaust survivors appealing for peace. Neil Bibby talked about the importance

of securing a ceasefire from all sides, and he is absolutely correct. That is difficult—for many, it is unimaginable—but that is not a reason not to work towards a ceasefire. It is a counsel of despair to suggest otherwise.

Jackson Carlaw was typically gracious and made a nuanced contribution, as I always expect of him. He reflected on the profound impact on the Jewish community in his constituency and, indeed, everywhere. That stood in stark contrast to one of his colleagues, who is sadly not in the Parliament today, who suggested on social media that the issue does not affect people here. As we have heard today, the issue really matters to people here. It really matters to Jewish and Israeli Scots and to Muslim and Palestinian Scots. It really matters to people right across Scotland who care deeply about humanity and decency, and it matters to all of us who care about communities and our solidarity with them.

The First Minister was able to see that when he visited the Giffnock synagogue, and I saw it when I visited the Edinburgh synagogue. I saw it only last week in St Mary's Episcopal cathedral in Edinburgh at the united for peace event, which was hosted by the Edinburgh Interfaith Association and which was standing room only. There were people from Christian denominations, there were Muslim and Jewish faith leaders and there were Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, humanists and many others. People do really care here, and it does really matter—it matters that we discuss this issue.

Then we come to the issue where there is not agreement among all members across the chamber, although I venture to suggest that we will see later that there is overwhelming support for a ceasefire.

For the record, we should remind ourselves that United Nations secretary general Antonio Guterres called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire on 24 October, nearly one month ago. On 26 October, the United Nations General Assembly voted for an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce. One hundred and twenty countries were for and 14 were against. Forty-five abstained, including the United Kingdom, to its shame. France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland—I could go on—voted for.

Not only members of the United Nations but some of our most valued third sector and charitable organisations have joined calls for a ceasefire: Amnesty International, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, CARE International UK, Christian Aid UK, Comic Relief, the International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief, Mercy Corps, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Oxfam, Save the Children, the United Nations Association of the

United Kingdom, War Child UK and War on Want—I could go on.

Sadly, given the inability of the Conservatives to support a ceasefire in their amendment, we will not vote in favour of it.

I thank colleagues very much for their speeches in the debate, which is on an issue that is urgent and relevant to us all. We have all watched in horror the catastrophic humanitarian situation unfolding in the middle east. To prevent further deaths, the bombing and the rocketing must stop. Humanitarian and medical facilities must be protected and civilians must be given unrestricted access to the basic necessities of life, wherever they are.

We again condemn the abhorrent acts committed by Hamas, recognise Israel's right to defend its citizens from terror and call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. However, we also continue to call for all parties to adhere to international law, which requires the protection of civilians, particularly children, and affords a special status to hospitals and humanitarian actors. The taking of hostages, indiscriminate bombing of civilian infrastructure, intentional starvation and forced displacement of a population are prohibited under the Geneva convention.

The bombardment and siege of Gaza has reportedly killed more than 13,000 people, injured more than 27,000 and displaced more than 1.7 million people. I am particularly concerned for Gaza's 1 million children, as all parents are. As was highlighted in a resolution that the UN Security Council passed last week, on average, one child is killed and two are injured every 10 minutes. That turns Gaza into what the UN secretary general has described as "a graveyard for children".

In his opening speech, the First Minister noted the increasingly dire situation in Gaza's hospitals, where doctors are trying to save lives without access to electricity, anaesthesia and other basic medical supplies. The largest hospital, the Al-Shifa hospital, has been described by the World Health Organization as a death zone following fatal air strikes and intensive gunfights over the past week. Only yesterday, the head of the WHO said that he is appalled by an attack on the Indonesian hospital that resulted in 12 deaths and dozens of injuries.

Innocent Palestinians continue to be caught up in the fight between Israel and Hamas, a fight from which they have no escape. According to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, hundreds of thousands of people remain in the north of Gaza as they are unwilling or unable to move to the south.

From the start of the conflict, Scotland has been clear that we stand ready to provide support where we can. We have committed £750,000 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's flash appeal, which will support the food, health, shelter and protection needs of people seeking safety. The quantity of humanitarian supplies that are getting into Gaza is a tiny fraction of what is needed, and essential electricity and water services have been cut off.

Driven by the ultimate goal of saving lives, and in line with the motion for the debate, we once again echo the United Nations secretary general's call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, an end to the siege on Gaza, unimpeded access for humanitarian aid and all parties to abide by international law. We call on all members of the international community, including the United Kingdom Government, to do everything that they can to protect against violations of international law and to facilitate the political solution that is needed to bring peace, security and stability to the region.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the situation in the middle east.

Decision Time

17:00

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): We now arrive at decision time. I note that Alex Cole-Hamilton did not move the published amendment in his name this afternoon. There are therefore three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-11342.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11342, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the situation in the middle east, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a brief suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:00

Meeting suspended.

17:03

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-11342.2, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11342, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the situation in the middle east. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)

(SNP)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11342.1, in the name of Anas Sarwar, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11342, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the situation in the middle east, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My iPad would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms McKelvie. I will make sure that your vote is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 91, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-11342, in the name of Humza Yousaf, as amended, on the situation in the middle east, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 90, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament unequivocally condemns in the strongest possible terms Hamas's barbaric and unjustifiable terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens on 7 October 2023, and demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages; agrees that all human life is equal, abhors the loss of innocent lives, and affirms the right of all Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security; further agrees that the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza, including women and children who have been besieged by Israeli forces, must stop; associates itself with the United Nations Secretary-General's statements that there must be an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to allow civilians to escape harm, for hostages to be released, for humanitarian aid to reach those in need, and affirming that international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, must be upheld; reiterates its solidarity with Scotland's Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian communities and condemns antisemitism, Islamophobia or any other form of hatred; welcomes the Scottish Government's contribution of £750,000 towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East's flash appeal for Gaza, and the humanitarian assistance announced by the UK Government; reaffirms that a credible, lasting and sustainable peace can only be based on the two-state solution through reinvigorated diplomatic and political efforts in the Middle East Peace Process; agrees with many in the international community that all parties must agree to an immediate ceasefire; recognises that, in order for any ceasefire to work, it requires all sides to comply; is horrified by the Hamas statement that it would repeat the 7 October attacks and continue rocket fire; regrets that Benjamin Netanyahu has stated that he will not

even consider a ceasefire; calls, therefore, on the international community to use every form of diplomacy to try and create the conditions on the ground to make a ceasefire a reality; further calls on the International Criminal Court to investigate the conduct of all parties in this conflict, and reaffirms the commitment to a lasting peace and a two-state solution with the end of illegal occupation, siege and settlements.

[Applause.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will now move to members' business. I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so as quickly and as quietly as possible.

Holodomor Memorial Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-11228, in the name of Colin Beattie, on Holodomor memorial day 2023. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 25 November 2023 is the annual Holodomor Memorial Day; notes that 2022-23 marks the 90th anniversary of Holodomor; considers that Holodomor, literally meaning extermination by hunger, was a man-made and deliberate campaign of starvation and violence carried out by the Soviet regime that resulted in the death of millions of people in Ukraine; believes that Holodomor was caused by a deliberate policy of the Soviet regime, as a mass murder against the people of Ukraine; recognises that Holodomor Memorial Day commemorates all the victims of the Holodomor, and expresses its solidarity with the people in Ukraine who suffered in this tragedy, and in particular with the remaining survivors of the Holodomor and their families; pays its respects to those who died as a consequence of what are considered to be these crimes committed by the totalitarian Soviet regime; expresses deep concern that the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor coincides with Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, which, it believes, involves a blatant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, coupled with what it sees as the aim to eradicate Ukraine as a nation-state and erode the identity and culture of its people; is aware of the longstanding relationship between Ukraine and Scotland, including the installation in 2017 of the Eternal Memory memorial stone on Calton Hill, Edinburgh, which was dedicated by the Ukrainian community in Scotland to commemorate the genocide by forced famine in Ukraine in 1932-33, and welcomes the formation of the Cross-Party Group on Ukraine within the Scottish Parliament, where Ukrainian interest groups in Scotland and elected officials come together to foster and strengthen the enduring relationship between Ukraine and Scotland.

17:10

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I thank all members who supported my motion for debate. I look forward to hearing tonight's speeches.

The term "Holodomor" is not a familiar one in Scotland. In Ukraine, it is all too familiar. As we approach the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor on 25 November, and as we observe the actions of the Russian state, which invaded Ukraine nearly two years ago, it is difficult to resist the idea that we are witnessing history repeat itself. The barbaric acts against Ukrainian civilians and, indeed, anyone who falls into Russian hands have shocked most of us. The appropriation of Ukrainian grain and agricultural equipment reinforces the impression.

What is the Holodomor? It translates from Ukrainian as "hunger extermination". During 1932 and 1933, between 3.5 million and 7 million

Ukrainians died of starvation in a famine that was artificially created by the Soviet state and Joseph Stalin, its dictator. We will probably never know the exact figure of all those who died.

There are people who would argue whether the Holodomor was, in fact, genocide, but I would ask them to consider how many millions must die for the term to be accepted. Leading historians who have devoted time to studying the Holodomor have all concluded that it was genocide, 34 nations have agreed that it was genocide, and the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defined genocide as acts having

"intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

Therefore, I will refer to the event as genocide.

As we commemorate this act of genocide, we should look at the causes and consequences of this act by the Soviet state, which is perhaps a lesson in history. In the aftermath of the first world war, Ukraine established the independent Ukrainian People's Republic in January 1918. For three years, the new republic fought the Bolshevik red army, but, ultimately, it lost the struggle and was subordinated to become part of the Soviet Union.

Under Vladimir Lenin, Ukraine gained a small degree of economic freedom, following resistance from local farmers to the forcible requisitioning of their crops and equipment. However, at the end of the 1920s, Stalin was dictator of the Soviet Union and he feared Ukrainian cultural autonomy and the possibility of an independence movement arising there. So began a crackdown on Ukrainian peasants, intellectuals and cultural elites. Widespread intimidation, arrests and imprisonment followed. Thousands of intellectuals, church leaders and Communist Party members were executed.

Stalin then declared a new five-year plan, which included the collectivisation of agriculture, giving the state control over grain supplies for export and local distribution. Grain exports were supposed to fund the Soviet Union to become a massive industrial power. History records some 4,000 local rebellions against collectivisation and the terror that was then unleashed. Tens of thousands of farmers were arrested; they were either shot or sent to labour camps. The wealthier and more successful farmers—the kulaks—were stripped of everything that they owned and eliminated as a class. They were either executed or deported far away.

That horror that was unleashed by Stalin set the stage for the ultimate horror of the Holodomor. Unrealistically high grain quotas were set, which were accompanied by measures to wipe out

significant numbers of the population of the Ukrainian nation. In August 1932, a decree said that anyone, even a child, who took any produce from a collective field could be shot or imprisoned. Famine escalated and the borders of Ukraine were sealed by the Soviets. More than one third of villages were blacklisted, which was, in effect, a collective death sentence, because the villages were surrounded by troops and residents were prevented from leaving or receiving food supplies.

People ate anything that might be edible, including grass, acorns, cats and dogs—there were even cases of cannibalism. At the height of the Holodomor, in June 1933, 28,000 Ukrainians were dying every day. However, while that was going on, the Soviet Union removed 4.27 million tonnes of grain from Ukraine, which is enough to feed 12 million people for a year. Make no mistake: that was a carefully calculated and methodical extermination of millions of people by a ruthless and bloody-handed Soviet Government. It was not done out of ignorance or any kind of administrative confusion, or by local officials without the knowledge and instruction of the central Government—the Soviet secret police, its military intelligence agency the GRU, and the red army were fully deployed.

At the time of that genocide, the Soviet Union denied that there was a famine and rejected offers of foreign aid. It was the 1980s before people could speak openly about that terrible period of history. Few journalists wrote about it at the time and it is poorly reported even now. Significantly, the current Russian Federation has admitted that there were famines in the 1930s but has not admitted the deliberate nature of the manufactured and artificial famine in Ukraine in 1932-33.

That was a very brief history of the Holodomor. It is important that we remember those atrocities, because humanity forgets such events all too quickly, particularly if they do not happen close to home.

Earlier in my speech, I mentioned the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which shows that Russia seems to have learned nothing. The capacity for barbarism—like that Russia inflicted in 1932-33—does not seem to have changed. The atrocities that Russian armed forces have perpetrated on civilians and prisoners of war alike are well documented and well evidenced. It is difficult to see how it is possible that, even after 90 years, there has been no civilising growth in Russia and no development of a better level of humanity and of respect for people's lives, particularly in the neighbouring nations.

It seems at the moment not only that Russia is prepared to sacrifice the people of Ukraine for the desires of its new tsar, but that there is no limit on the number of Russia's own people who must also

pay the price. It is an utterly pointless war with no clear endgame. Aggression must not be allowed to pay.

The long-standing links between the people of Ukraine and Scotland were shown in 2017 with the installation of the eternal memory stone on Edinburgh's Calton hill. That stone was dedicated by the Ukrainian community in Scotland, to commemorate the genocide of the forced famine in Ukraine in 1932-33. Those links were further enhanced by the recent formation of the parliamentary cross-party group on Ukraine. I am honoured to be the convener of that group and look forward to seeing a further strengthening of the relationship between the two countries.

On 25 November, we should all reflect on the atrocities that have gone before and those that we see now. I end with a simple call for us to join with the people of Ukraine, particularly those who have made their homes among us as a result of the current war, in commemorating the genocide of the Holodomor and in working together to ensure that such events can never happen again.

17:18

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Colin Beattie on bringing this timely debate to the chamber.

We debated this topic just over nine years ago, in 2014, which was the year in which Russia illegally annexed Crimea. In my speech then, I said that 25 countries officially recognised the Holodomor as a deliberate act of genocide against the Ukrainian people. That list of countries has now grown to 34. It includes Germany, France and the United States. The United Kingdom Government has said that it would refer to the event as genocide only following a determination by a competent court. Recently, the Welsh Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution, Mick Antoniw MS, unequivocally declared the Holodomor to be an act of genocide. I urge the Scottish Government to follow suit.

Genocide can refer to a range of acts committed with the intent of destroying a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. There is no doubt that the Ukrainian Holodomor was such a case. During the Russian revolution, Ukrainians declared an independent Ukrainian People's Republic in January 1918. In 1921, that was forcibly incorporated as a Soviet republic, bar a few provinces that were taken over by Poland.

That did not stop nascent movements of cultural liberalisation, nationalism and intellectualism. In fact, Ukrainian language use in education, the mass media and Government was actively promoted by the Soviet authorities in the 1920s. However, in the late 1920s, Joseph Stalin's

Bolsheviks sought to eradicate Ukraine's perceived intellectual and cultural elites and its very national identity. Stalin initiated mass-scale political repression through widespread arrests, imprisonment and execution. Thousands of Ukrainian intellectuals, church leaders and Ukrainian Communist Party functionaries who supported pro-Ukrainian policies were shot. Subsequently, in the great purge, their replacements who did not support pro-Ukrainian policies were also shot.

Concurrently, Stalin proceeded with the collectivisation of agriculture to fund Soviet industrialisation. Self-sufficient landowning peasants resisted collectivisation but had their belongings seized and were then executed or deported to Siberia in appalling conditions.

In Ukraine, a famine was engineered by setting grain quotas so high that they were impossible to achieve. When the devastating effects of the famine became clear, the regime intensified rather than reversed its policy. As Colin Beattie pointed out, the five stalks of grain decree declared that anyone—even a child—caught taking produce from a collective field could be shot or imprisoned for stealing socialist property. Fleeing the country was impossible, with the border effectively sealed.

No one knows how many died—from 3.5 million to 7 million, out of a population of just over 31 million in 1930, with some provinces losing more than a third of their people. At the height of the Holodomor, 28,000 Ukrainians were dying every day. People resorted to eating wild animals and pets and, in some cases, cannibalism. Meanwhile, Moscow rejected aid from abroad and grain rotted in warehouses. The repercussions became especially bad in rural Ukraine, Kuban and other areas of high Ukrainian ethnicity, as well as in Kazakhstan.

In the 1926 census, the Kuban population was 3.4 million, of whom almost half—49.2 per cent—were Ukrainian and about 1.4 million were Russian. Other figures from the same census show that Ukrainian speakers made up 55 per cent of the population. However, by the 2002 Russian census, only 2 per cent of the population spoke Ukrainian and fewer than 1 per cent were noted as being ethnically Ukrainian. That is because, after the famine subsided, settlers were brought into Ukraine from Russia.

In 1953, the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide” to provide a legal concept for the Nazi holocaust, asserted that the Holodomor was

“perhaps the classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment in Russification—the destruction of the Ukrainian nation.”

Lemkin said that, because there were so many Ukrainians, the Soviets could not kill them all. Instead, the genocide consisted of four steps: extermination of the Ukrainian national elite; liquidation of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; destruction of a significant part of Ukraine's peasantry as custodians of traditions, folklore, music, national language and literature; and populating the territory with Russians to eventually dissolve Ukrainian national identity.

Genocide is a complex process that targets institutions, culture and economic existence, and not necessarily their immediate destruction. In the context of the on-going illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Soviet Union's de facto successor, Russia, which Colin Beattie's motion mentions, Ukrainians in Scotland and compatriots and relatives in Ukraine would welcome the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government unequivocally declaring that the Holodomor was, indeed, genocide.

17:23

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): It seems quite extraordinary in terms of scheduling that we have moved from events in the middle east, which so terrify and appal us, to the commemoration of events in Ukraine, visited currently by fresh conflict from Russia, which intimidate and terrify us all over again. It is extraordinary that some 7 million people died long before the events of the Holocaust, a decade later. There were two Holocausts, if you like—genocides of respective peoples, one by fascists and one by Bolsheviks, with both sides claiming to have been on the right side of history. I call that a lazy phrase, because only history can judge those things. Ultimately, history did not favour either the Bolsheviks or the fascists.

The figure is quite extraordinary: 7 million people. The Holocaust that was visited upon the Jewish population was of Jews from the continent over—and indeed, beyond. The Holodomor was visited on the population of a single country—the working agricultural, rural workforce, which was effectively starved to death by a kind of collectivist nonsense promulgated by the Soviet, blinkered mentality of how an agricultural, agrarian community should operate, which simply led, by greater and greater degrees, to the deaths of so many.

There were higher and higher quotas that could not be fulfilled, the repatriation to the land of anybody who sought to leave, and the confiscation of the very seeds that were needed to establish and achieve a higher grain yield in the subsequent year. It was effectively a death sentence to be left to try to meet the theoretical nonsense of the

Bolshevik Soviets in those ghastly years, and so many starved to death.

For decades afterwards, there was a denial of those things, and there still is. Although there is absolute condemnation of Hitler and Nazism across the world—albeit, unfortunately, there are those somewhere on the extreme far right who will still look to the Nazis—there is still sometimes a wider sympathy for Stalin. There is an effort to rehabilitate him slightly in Putin’s Russia, where some of the statues are going back up, yet that man was responsible for the deaths of tens of millions across what was his own country—never mind anyone else’s—and this appalling atrocity that was visited on the people there.

The Prime Minister visited Ukraine last year, in the run-up to the commemoration of the Holodomor.

There has been some debate about whether or not the Holodomor was a genocide. In the debate that took place in the House of Commons, my colleague David Mundell said:

“how would the UK’s standing be diminished in any way by recognising the holodomor as a genocide?”—[*Official Report, House of Commons, 25 May 2023; Vol 733, c 519.*]

I completely associate myself with those sentiments. I think that we can—not happily, but collectively—agree that it was a genocide visited on the people of Ukraine, and we see, with ghastly symbolism and symmetry, a shocking conflict visited upon them yet again. President Zelensky said:

“Once they wanted to destroy us with hunger, now, with darkness and cold”,

and with bombs and weapons, but the people of Ukraine will not forget and the world will not forget their actions.

The motion refers to events across our own country that are offering support. I pay tribute to the communities in Clarkston and Giffnock in my constituency that have worked so hard to make Ukrainian refugees here feel welcome. That will be the story of every member across the chamber.

It is so depressing that, in a single day in this Parliament, in this era, all these years later, we have had to debate two conflicts that have caused so much pain in the past and continue to cause so much pain and suffering today. The Holodomor was a genocide and, 90 years on, we should recognise and remember it as such.

17:27

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I will open with an echo of what Jackson Carlaw has just said. It is an astonishing day in this Parliament for us to be talking about events that are

happening literally as we stand here and speak, and about events that happened not far shy of 100 years ago so close to us on this continent. I extend my compliments and thanks to Colin Beattie for bringing this debate to the chamber and for the huge amount of work that he does in the cross-party group on Ukraine to show the support that exists in the chamber and across Scotland for Ukraine.

I pause to wonder whether we need to rehearse the true atrocity of the instance that we are talking about, which has been so perfectly, graphically and importantly reminded to the chamber. If I may contradict Colin Beattie on one small point, I am not sure whether the Holodomor is unknown in Scotland. The Ukrainians who reside here—those who have been forced to due to current events and those who came here further back in history—rightly remind the communities that they live in of the importance of that matter. However, the important act of remembrance that happened in 2017 on Calton Hill should be more widely known about—I absolutely agree with that.

Things such as our debate this evening and members of this Parliament going out and speaking to their communities about the Holodomor or being present when Ukrainians in their communities speak about it send a powerful message about why it should be remembered for what it was—an attempt to destroy a nation by a small group of individuals taking decisions about millions of people’s lives.

When I look at what is happening in Ukraine today and look back to the 2014 invasion of Crimea, which has already been mentioned, I do not think that it is about the Russians or Russia; it is about appalling leaders of that nation, and particularly the way that Putin wants to destroy Ukraine because of an appalling, misguided belief in some historic, greater Soviet Union. Ukrainians reside in a country that has a right to govern itself, and it speaks to their pride that they are standing up to Putin and his appalling leaders, who are forcing the deaths of thousands of people.

It is right that, on 25 November, we remember the Holodomor, which still echoes today, all these years later. As we heard in our debate earlier this afternoon, it is important that politicians, who seek to lead and speak for communities, address things now. We cannot just expect people to put things right in the future. It is our responsibility to do better, whether in our tiny communities, in our country, on our continent or across the world. It is sad that it perhaps takes such events to remind us of that, but the hopeful aspect is perhaps that they force us not to turn away from the really difficult decisions that we need to take going forward—decisions that require discussions to happen.

In the Holodomor, upwards of 7 million people paid the price. Since then, millions of others have paid the price. Perhaps it is time for politicians to remember that what they do should be done for their communities and that we have, to echo the words of Jo Cox, more in common than that which divides us.

17:32

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank Colin Beattie for his work on the cross-party group on Ukraine and for bringing this important debate to the Parliament. I also thank the other speakers for their contributions.

I first learned about the Holodomor from my good friend and former MSP Stefan Tymkewycz. To the best of my knowledge, at that time, Stef was my only Ukrainian friend, but I now have many Ukrainian friends. I thank the diaspora of Ukrainian people, a number of whom who are in the public gallery, for bringing an exhibition about the Holodomor to the Parliament about six years ago in order to inform MSPs and help them to understand what happened to their families and their country. Given the comments that we have heard about the importance of raising awareness, I think that it is time that we had that exhibition back. I would be more than happy to work with people to ensure that that happens sometime soon.

Around that time, I was lucky enough to visit Canada and the United States with the then Presiding Officer, Ken Macintosh, and we went to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. It is the first museum in the world that is solely dedicated to the evolution, celebration and future of human rights, and visiting it is a profound experience. It has a gallery called the breaking the silence gallery, which contains exhibitions that remember, commemorate and inform people about the genocides of the world. The Holodomor was included there because Canada recognises it as a genocide, as the UK should. It has been mentioned that today has been a very impactful one in the Parliament, with our thinking about Palestine and Gaza. I pray that Palestine and Gaza do not end up in that gallery and that something can be done to bring peace there, too.

The breaking the silence gallery includes a 10-minute film that shows footage from Ukraine at the time of the Holodomor, including some of the propaganda posters from the Soviets that denied that there was any problem in Ukraine. Colin Beattie has laid out the situation around that very well. We must thank journalists such as Malcolm Muggeridge, who worked for the *Manchester Guardian* then. At great risk to himself, he defied the Soviets, went into Ukraine, and brought back real reports about what was happening on the

ground there. That was a real testimony to what was happening in Ukraine. Unfortunately, that did not suit some of the political systems here at the time, and the Soviets were still moving towards being considered allies after world war two. Many people here denied what happened in the Holodomor, but we should not do so today.

I mentioned my friends from the Ukrainian diaspora. I know many of Stefan Tymkewycz's family now, and I was very pleased to host a Ukrainian Institute exhibition that showed how the current conflict is trying to destroy every part of Ukrainian culture, from theatres to churches, and trying to stop the language being spoken.

A few years ago, I took part in a culture summit with Jonathan Mills on a special Ukrainian day. Funnily enough, invitations from friends from the Ukrainian Institute that invite me to a conference on cultural diplomacy in early December have recently dropped into my inbox. At that time, we talked a lot about what Scotland could do to preserve and help Ukrainian culture. I ask the minister to consider and talk with me about how we might take our culture to Ukraine and bring more Ukrainian culture here.

I have many friends in the displaced Ukrainian community here. Some are from Ukrainian Ballet Freedom, and we met some of them when our committee was doing work with displaced Ukrainians. There are also friends who have settled and are very welcome in my constituency.

It is nearly two years since the atrocities started. Tonight, I say to our friends in the gallery:

"Ukraine's glory has not yet perished, nor her freedom,
Upon us, brother Ukrainians, fate shall smile once more.
Our enemies will vanish like dew in the morning sun,
And we too shall rule, brothers, in a free land of our
own."

Slava Ukraini!

17:37

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): I thank Colin Beattie for bringing this debate to the chamber.

We must always remember and continue to learn the lessons from one of the cruellest and most horrifying human rights violations in history. The monumental nature of the afternoon that we have had in our Parliament has not been lost on me, as it has not been on Jackson Carlaw. It always makes me feel proud of the Parliament when we join together as we do in situations such as this.

Members have made many points, and I want to pick up on all of them, if I can. I will pick up on the point about genocide at the end of my comments.

Colin Beattie eloquently described what happened in the Holodomor. Everybody has given a meaningful contribution, and we have all been given an opportunity to acknowledge and remember the victims of the Holodomor. Colin Beattie talked about grain, the need for which is such a basic need. Maslow's hierarchy of needs would have grain sitting there as a key platform—food is what people need. Enough grain to feed 12 million people for a year was removed in the Holodomor, which resulted in famine.

Colin Beattie mentioned the cross-party group on Ukraine, which I was delighted to hear about. It will meet on 5 December, and I look forward to seeing how it will work not just to recognise Ukrainians in Scotland but to live up to the oath that we have all taken today to remember what happened in the Holodomor. I wish Colin Beattie, the cross-party group and everyone involved in it my best.

One aspect of remembrance is the memorial stone at Calton Hill. If members have not been up to see it, I urge them to do so and to take a moment of quiet reflection to understand what happened.

Kenneth Gibson said in his speech that Stalin was erasing the culture of the Ukrainian people and that a hungry child could be shot for taking grain that, in some cases, had rotted away. Jackson Carlaw said in his speech that 7 million people in a single country effectively starved to death, which was denied for decades. We all recognise the deep generational hurt and trauma that were caused by that denial, and we should never allow the Holodomor to go back into the shadows.

Martin Whitfield said that we should raise awareness. I am pleased that all the speeches in the debate did that and that the Scottish Parliament has a great record of doing that. We should always remember, we should always raise awareness and we should always use our words and our privileged position to do that at every opportunity.

One thing that struck me about Martin Whitfield's speech was that he said that hope should not allow us to turn away. Sometimes, in the darkest of days, there is a pinnacle of light—and that is hope. We should keep it alive in everything that we do.

I would never turn down an invitation from my dear friend Clare Adamson to take part in any of her work, and I will be more than happy to accept her invitation. She said that we have many Ukrainian friends, and I have made new friends from the families that we have looked after over the past year or so. My thoughts every day are with one of my friends from my old Council of

Europe days, Oleksandr Senkevych, who is the mayor of Mykolaiv and who, quite frankly, has kept that city running. We will keep them all in our hearts due to the situation that they face.

On the issue of defining genocide, there is no doubt that there are many requirements and issues. I was glad to hear about David Mundell's challenge to the United Kingdom Government. I also offer that challenge. Although we recognise that the Holodomor was a horrific situation for the Ukrainian people, it remains the Scottish Government's position that a judicial body, not a Government, should make that determination. If the UK Government and its courts want to do that in an international context, we would be happy to look at that. However, that in no way detracts from our recognition of the appalling tragedy of the Holodomor and its importance to the history of Ukraine and the people of Ukraine.

Today, of all days, we have expressed in the chamber our solidarity with the people of Ukraine who suffered and lost loved ones in that man-made famine. The Scottish Government recognises the pain and suffering that the Holodomor caused and its continued impact on Ukraine and the Ukrainian community, including those who have chosen to make Scotland their home, who, I hope, have felt our warm Scottish welcome.

We welcome the tireless efforts of the Ukrainian consulate, the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain and all those who keep alive the memory of those who lost their lives in the Holodomor.

It is deeply concerning that the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor coincides with Russia's on-going aggression towards Ukraine and its attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The memories of that tragedy are all too vivid, with Russia once again choosing the path of terror and the humanitarian crisis that the war has caused.

Scotland condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, and we stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. We continue to stand for democracy, human rights and the rule of law at home and abroad, and we continue to offer our on-going support to Ukrainians in Scotland. I am proud of the Scottish Government's work, including the work that took place during my time as equalities minister, to help to ensure that everyone in our society can live with human dignity and enjoy their rights in full.

Reflecting on the human tragedy of the Holodomor reinforces why it is so important that the UK remains fully committed to the European convention on human rights and that it does not become an outlier like Russia and Belarus by leaving the 70-year-old treaty that protects our human rights and political freedoms. We know that

the international community's support is vital to help Ukraine to win the war and secure longer-term peace and stability in Europe. We must continue to provide that support for as long as it is needed.

Over a number of generations, Scotland has gained the well-deserved reputation of being a welcoming, tolerant and inclusive country. We defend vigorously the rights of our citizens. We also welcome citizens from Ukraine and beyond, who bring a rich diversity to our communities and create a vibrant and dynamic country. As part of our on-going solidarity with Ukraine, we will continue to support displaced people from Ukraine to settle well in Scotland, and we will continue to do what we can to provide that warm future and the support to build a new life here. In Scotland, just as in Ukraine, we seek to understand and learn from the past in order to shape a better future.

I close by paying tribute to the people who continue to work to keep alive the memory of those who died in the Holodomor. Many are in the public gallery, but many others are not here today. It was a horrific, man-made disaster of unimaginable scale.

The Scottish Government stands with Ukraine today. Slava Ukraini! [*Applause.*]

Meeting closed at 17:45.

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