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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 3 September 2025

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

Portfolio Question Time

Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions. The first portfolio is Deputy First Minister responsibilities, economy and Gaelic.

Edinburgh's Festivals (Economic Impact)

1. **Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the economy secretary has had with business leaders regarding work to maximise the economic impact of Edinburgh's festivals. (S6O-04866)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): We are always working with Edinburgh's festivals to maximise economic opportunities and to complement the year-round efforts of each of these flagship cultural events.

Alongside the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, I convened a round table on Friday 22 August with business, data and diplomatic leaders, exploring how we can collectively maximise the fringe's economic impact.

With last month's outstanding Edinburgh festival programmes in mind, I congratulate the artists, performing companies, production teams, supporting staff and everyone whose work makes Edinburgh's festivals a global cultural highlight.

Foysol Choudhury: We know how important our cultural and creative sectors are to the economy and how they can drive growth. In her meeting with businesses following Edinburgh's festivals, did the Deputy First Minister highlight the benefits of investing in culture and corporate sponsorship of cultural events? Will she commit to further engagement to support private investment in our cultural and creative sectors?

Kate Forbes: The short answer is yes—I commit to on-going engagement. Foysol Choudhury identified a number of different funding sources. The Scottish Government has provided funding to support the fringe this year, but at that round table, international leaders in particular commented on how much their Governments invest in supporting those from their nations who are performing at the fringe, highlighting that it is a global phenomenon. We are proud to continue to support it.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Scotland's festivals are a vital part of our cultural landscape, a boost to tourism and an important part of our regional economies. Will the Deputy First Minister say more about how the Scottish Government is working to support festivals in the wider cultural sector in Scotland through the increased funding in the 2025-26 Scottish budget?

Kate Forbes: As a result of the biggest increase in culture funding in the history of the Parliament, Scotland's festivals have benefited from significant increases in core funding through Creative Scotland's multiyear funding programme. A third of that funding programme's recipients run a festival, and a number of them are receiving multiyear funding for the first time.

Last month, we announced the creation of an expanded festivals fund. The application process opened today—Wednesday 3 September. It is administered by Creative Scotland and supports non-profit arts and cultural festivals across Scotland. The £1.8 million fund will provide up to £200,000 in grants per festival in its first year to those that are not already in receipt of festival expo funding.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Such is the success of Edinburgh's festivals that, at one point last month, Edinburgh was the most expensive destination in the world for people to visit. There are concerns in the industry about the perception of Scotland as a high-cost destination. Does the Deputy First Minister agree with the evidence that we heard at the Economy and Fair Work Committee this morning that councils such as the City of Edinburgh Council need to take that into account when setting the visitor levy, which is coming down the track?

Kate Forbes: Murdo Fraser is right to highlight the overall costs of the festivals. Accommodation costs are one of the biggest challenges across the fringe ecosystem because they affect artists, visitors and residents. One of the priority areas for the strategic partnership for Scotland's festivals, which is led by Angus Robertson, is to look at that issue in greater detail.

Murdo Fraser will also be aware of some of the wider support for artists, particularly the "Keep it fringe" fund, which is administered to reduce financial barriers for artists performing at the fringe. We need to look more broadly at what to do to keep the fringe accessible to as many artists as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Digital Exclusion

3. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it has taken on digital exclusion to address the "weakened" national leadership referred to by Audit Scotland in its report "Tackling digital exclusion", which was published 12 months ago. (S6O-04868)

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): The Government welcomes the report and is working with local government to take action on digital exclusion. Our approach has evolved since the pandemic, but our commitment remains firm. We are tackling root causes of digital exclusion while developing sustainable ways to mitigate its impact.

A refresh of the digital strategy, developed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, will set a national direction, followed by an action plan with measurable outcomes. We are embedding inclusion into public services, ensuring that access is not an afterthought, and we will continue to lead cross-sector collaboration, including through the digital inclusion alliance, addressing digital exclusion as a national priority.

Daniel Johnson: She may not be answering this question, but I take this opportunity to say that I was saddened to hear that the Deputy First Minister will not be standing at the next election. She will be missed by the Parliament.

According to the Lloyds consumer index, 15 per cent of adults lack foundation-level digital skills, and 9 per cent of households have no internet access. That is not just digital exclusion; it is exclusion from healthcare, education and democracy. Twelve months on from the report, we have still not had a strategy. Indeed, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has withdrawn from working with the Scottish Government, because those at the SCVO fundamentally disagree with the direction of travel.

Despite £764,000 coming from the United Kingdom Government's £9.5 million digital innovation fund, there are no plans from the Scottish Government on how it will spend that money. Will the minister set out how the Scottish Government intends to tackle digital exclusion and how it will spend the £764,000 that is coming to it?

Richard Lochhead: We welcome the fact that the UK Government is now taking action on digital exclusion, and we want to work with it on that. We welcome the resource that will come to Scotland as part of the budget mentioned by the member. Once that cash is with us and we work things out with COSLA and those in other sectors regarding the refreshed strategy that I referred to, it will be put to good use on top of the existing budget for connecting Scotland. That work is already under way and the budget is being spent on tackling the issue.

We have to find new ways to proceed. The member is quite right in that a gap of 15 per cent is one that is too large by 15 per cent, especially in this day and age, when artificial intelligence and other technologies are becoming increasingly important. Everyone should have the same opportunity to take advantage of the digital world in which we now live.

It is important that the voluntary sector, the business community, the Government and the public sector are all working together on the issue. That is the solution going forward, and it will be at the heart of the new strategy. I very much welcome the partnership that was announced just last week, I think, between Virgin Media O2 and citizens advice bureaux. The Scottish Government has assisted that partnership, which will deliver thousands of free smartphones to vulnerable groups in Scotland. That shows what can be achieved by working together, and we have to support such initiatives going forward.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Keeping Scotland at the forefront of digital literacy and innovation is a priority that will enable Scotland to pioneer the industries of the future. Can the minister say more about Scotland's upcoming innovation week and about how we can maintain the momentum, both for our economy and for our society?

Richard Lochhead: The member raises a good point. I am very excited by Scotland's first national innovation week, which will take place later this month. I hope that members will pay attention to it. It will display and showcase a lot of the amazing innovation that is under way in every single corner of Scotland.

Digital inclusion is an important area that can be supported by digital innovations. Over the past couple of years, I have met people in many companies that are working on new devices, software and so on that can benefit people who may be harder to reach. The member raises a very important dimension to national innovation week, noting Scotland's track record and pedigree in innovation.

Scotland's Start-up Economy

4. **Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the recently published NatWest Group and Beauhurst's "New Startup Index", indicating that

Scotland has one of the fastest growing start-up economies in the UK. (S6O-04869)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): I am hugely encouraged by the NatWest's "New Startup Index", which shows Scotland's strong performance in business formations. Scotland saw 17.9 per cent growth in new business incorporations compared with 2024, demonstrating significant momentum in the start-up economy. We are by far the fastest-growing start-up economy in the United Kingdom and one of the fastest growing in Europe. That growth is not accidental; it is thanks to sustained investment and focus by the Government and policy choices such as the Techscaler programme, alongside the ambition and hard work of Scotland's innovators and entrepreneurs, who should be enormously proud of themselves.

Elena Whitham: Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the report shows that Scotland is the fastest growing start-up economy in the UK and one of the fastest growing in Europe, with investment growing by 120 per cent in just over four years? Does she agree that that remarkable progress has been achieved by forward-thinking Scottish Government policies, in the face of Brexit damaging trade and labour markets and successive UK Governments failing to deliver the investment that Scotland needs? That is especially the case in rural communities such as mine, where all and any opportunities and such positive growth are very much welcome.

Kate Forbes: It is certainly encouraging to see the output from the work that we have undertaken in the past few years to change our enterprise support from being quite generic to, instead, vastly improving the scale and quality of infrastructure that is tailored to high-growth founders.

Scotland's transformation into one of Europe's fastest-growing start-up economies is a testament to that ambition and to the resilience and innovation of our people and businesses. The 120 per cent growth in investment over just four years is not only impressive but a clear signal that our forward-thinking policies have delivered real results. That has involved working in partnership with several different organisations. It was kicked off by Scotland's first chief entrepreneur, Mark Logan.

Increased Taxation (Highlands and Islands)

5. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the economy secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the economic impact of any increased taxation by United Kingdom, Scottish and local governments on people and businesses across the Highlands and Islands. (S6O-04870)

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): Ministers have regular discussions with their colleagues on a range of issues that have an economic impact, including growth and taxation.

In relation to recent tax rises, of most concern to us is the additional burden created by the UK Government's decision to change employer national insurance rates and thresholds. Undoubtedly, that is having an impact on businesses in the Highlands and Islands and across Scotland. The UK Government's own economic impact assessment confirmed that the changes will result in lower employment and higher costs for businesses across the UK.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Businesses across my region are facing growing pressures on their bottom line, with increased energy costs, regulation and tax bills. Meanwhile, their customers' spend is impacted by cost of living issues as well as on-going increases in their own taxes, most notably council tax.

In Orkney, two popular local hospitality businesses announced before the summer that they were closing their doors, while others that I spoke to during my summer tour of the Highlands and Islands made it clear: they are not sure, even with the huge effort and sacrifices that owners and staff often make, that their businesses are sustainable in the long term. They do not feel that the Scottish Government—or, for that matter, the UK Government or local government—truly understands the crisis that is facing our restaurants, pubs and bars, nor the devastating impact of the policies being wrought on the sector. Does the minister recognise their concerns? If he does, what will the Scottish Government do to better support our hospitality businesses?

Richard Lochhead: As a member who represents a constituency that lies in Mr Halcro Johnston's region, I am very familiar with some of the issues and concerns of my local businesses. Those concerns are reflected throughout the Highlands and Islands and, indeed, in many parts of Scotland. I recognise the pressures that many businesses, particularly smaller ones, face at the moment. The First Minister and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce have made representations to the UK Government on its forthcoming budget, to ensure that measures come out of that to alleviate the massive pressures on businesses.

The businesses that I speak to are talking mostly about national insurance contributions, VAT, tourism and a range of other issues that are the responsibility of the UK Government. We in

Scotland must pay attention to those pressures and take them into account, as must local authorities in their decisions in the coming months.

The Deputy First Minister highlighted some exciting statistics about the new businesses being created in Scotland, with record-breaking increases in the first six months of this year compared with the first six months of last year, and a pleasant surprise from those statistics was that the sector with the biggest representation in that increase in new businesses was hospitality. Clearly, the situation is patchy across the country. In saying that, I am not talking down the pressures that the hospitality sector is facing in a variety of areas—I speak to those businesses very regularly. Indeed, I want to congratulate The Pier, a new cafe in the hospitality sector in Lossiemouth, which has opened in the past couple of months. There are new businesses out there that are doing a great job against very tough backdrops, and we should congratulate them on their resilience.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Spiralling energy costs and Labour's national insurance hike are squeezing the public sector and businesses alike and limiting their ability to grow and invest. Does the minister agree that Labour must urgently abandon that tax on jobs? Can he say any more about the support that the Scottish Government is offering to businesses in Scotland's Highlands and Islands?

Richard Lochhead: I join Emma Roddick in her appeal to the UK Labour Government, which, when it was first elected, said that it had a growth mission but went on to introduce an increase in tax for businesses that is causing real problems. If I had a pound for every time a business raised that issue with me, I would be a very rich person.

The national insurance rise is a huge issue that is of equivalent importance to the energy issue. It is perhaps the biggest issue that is being raised by businesses—especially small businesses—throughout Scotland at the moment. I appeal to the Labour Party to take that on board in the forthcoming budget. The NI increase is crippling businesses the length and breadth of Scotland. We have had rising energy costs when we were promised lower energy costs, and rising business costs when we were promised a growth mission.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 comes from Tim Eagle, who joins us remotely.

Regional Growth Deals (Highlands and Islands)

6. **Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how growth deals are growing the economy of the Highlands and Islands region. (S6O-04871)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): The substantial £242.5 million that we are investing in four growth deals across the Highlands and Islands will empower and enable regional partners to deliver a wide range of projects that are tailored to local needs and circumstances. Those projects, which have been chosen by local partners for their areas, will deliver infrastructure, housing, skills, transport and innovation to drive economic growth at local and regional level and secure lasting benefits.

Tim Eagle: The growth deals are delivering jobs, infrastructure and certainty of investment, as was highlighted in the recent Economy and Fair Work Committee report. However, current levels of inflation remain an on-going concern. There is scope to further extend the benefits of the growth deals in areas such as Moray by ensuring that any just transition funds are split fairly and by actively supporting other projects along the energy corridor between Aberdeen and the green freeport in Invergordon.

Can the Government confirm that it is monitoring the effects of inflation and its impact on projects and that it will ensure that the just transition funding that impacts Moray, which has the potential to expand the projects in the area under the growth deal, is split fairly between the three council areas?

Kate Forbes: The member raises a number of important issues that are high on my list of priorities. He mentioned the impact of inflation. We remain closely involved with each of the growth deals in order to understand what is affecting progress, particularly when it comes to infrastructure.

The member also mentioned other schemes, such as the just transition fund. It has long been my view that growth deals established a different way of operating. That tripartite arrangement between the Scottish Government, the United Kingdom Government and local authorities has worked really well, and I think that it is a great model for the future.

Calls have been made for a second phase of growth deals, and we are very happy to continue to engage with the other participants in the tripartite arrangement—the UK Government and local authorities—to look at how we can progress that. However, the member was right to refer to the funding that is available right now, which can be delivered in response to applications that are made. I could go into detail on the various projects that have already benefited from just transition funding, but I will simply say that I have been really impressed by what local partners have delivered with the funding that they have received.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I apologise for being slightly late in getting to the chamber.

With the islands growth deal now in its delivery phase, positive outcomes are already evident, such as the recent completion of the £2.3 million University of the Highlands and Islands north-west and Hebrides campus transformation project. Can the Government give an update on some of the many other ways in which, working in conjunction with the deal, the Scottish Government continues to support the growth of economies across the Highlands and Islands?

Kate Forbes: There is a long list of ways in which we are doing that. The list is probably too long to go into in this question-and-answer session, but I am more than happy to give Mr Allan chapter and verse in writing. It could include our allocation this financial year of more than £56 million to Highlands and Islands Enterprise to support its work with businesses and communities across the region. We have also approved £7.5 million of funding to support community investments, which is helping 30 community anchor organisations provide vital services for their communities.

There is the £33.7 million to develop Stornoway deep-water port on the Isle of Lewis, which is a key piece of infrastructure that is needed to optimise opportunities for tourism and renewable energy for the Highlands. The Scottish Futures Trust estimates that that development is capable of unlocking between £5 billion and £7 billion over the next decade.

There is also direct investment specific to our islands in this year's budget, including the provision of £9 million to island-focused investments, in addition to the continued support that we are providing across portfolios such as transport, housing and health.

As I have said, it is a very long list, and I am more than happy to give Mr Allan the detail in writing.

Steel Companies (Operations in Scotland)

7. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its discussions with GFG Alliance, Liberty Steel and Alvance British Aluminium regarding the companies' operations in Scotland. (S6O-04872)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with management at Alvance British Aluminium, Liberty Steel Dalzell and the wider GFG Alliance.

The Lochaber businesses are performing well, employing more than 200 people and making significant contributions to both the local and Scottish economies. GFG remains committed to the future of the Dalzell plant and has firm plans to restart operations in the near future, after securing a contract for 40 kilotonnes of plate for maritime use.

I will provide a statement to Parliament next week to set out further details on the Scottish assets and our discussions with GFG on their future.

Willie Rennie: There will be scepticism in Lochaber and Lanarkshire, as we have had so many false dawns before. At the smelter, we were promised a wheel-making plant, 2,000 jobs and a billet plant, but none of that has happened. Indeed, last month, it was on the verge of being struck off Companies House. The workers at Dalzell have been sitting at home for months, as the company cannot afford to buy the materials to fulfil any orders. There has also been the forced liquidation of the speciality steels business in the UK.

If things are going so well, has the company indicated when it will pay back the £7 million loan to the Scottish Government? How long will the Scottish Government give the GFG Alliance to deliver before it steps in?

Ivan McKee: We are committed to continuing to work with the owners. It is worth recognising that, after many years, the two businesses in Lochaber and Dalzell are still operating and continue to maintain employment in those locations, which was far from certain previously. What the Scottish Government has done in working with the owners to keep those plants employing people locally is not insignificant and needs to be recognised. We will continue to work with the owners, and we have significant contingency plans in place for any eventualities, should there be any change in circumstances.

As I have said, I will make a statement on the matter next week, when there will be a further opportunity to give more information.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): News that the Labour Government has taken control of Liberty Steel in Yorkshire was another kick in the teeth for the Scottish workers at Grangemouth. Does the minister agree that it would appear that Westminster's support for industrial assets and regional economies depends on which side of the border they are found?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite the minister to respond, to the extent that that falls within the broad reach of the question lodged by Mr Rennie.

Ivan McKee: During the general election campaign last year, the Labour Party made bold and far-reaching commitments on intervening to support Grangemouth's transition in the near term. So far, unfortunately, those commitments have not materialised in the way that we had all hoped.

The UK Government's commitment to deploy £200 million from the National Wealth Fund in Grangemouth in the future is to be welcomed, but we need to see the sort of at-scale intervention that we have seen in other parts of the UK—and now, if we are to avert further industrial unemployment loss across the industrial cluster.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I am sure that the minister will welcome the fantastic news on Sunday that Scotland—by which I mean Glasgow—has won the biggest shipbuilding export order in this country's history, with five type 26 frigates going to Norway. However, the frustration is that, as it currently stands, no Scottish steel plate will be able to be supplied to that programme unless we can get Dalzell back up and running. Will the minister give an assurance that he will do all that he can to get it back up and running, so that we can get steel plate from Scotland into those fantastic Scottish frigates?

Ivan McKee: I give that assurance. As I have said, we have been working extensively with GFG on the potential for new orders. I have also indicated that there were maritime orders in the pipeline, and we will be able to give more information on that in the near future.

We will continue to work with the owners to look for other opportunities to get the plant back up and running, but it is worth recognising that it is only through the work of the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise that the plant is still capable of fulfilling those orders, as it has been supported through this period of time.

Grangemouth Cluster

8. **Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the economy secretary has had with United Kingdom Government ministers regarding the potential impact on the Scottish economy of recent developments with the Grangemouth cluster. (S6O-04873)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): I have regular engagements with various UK Government ministers, not least yesterday, when I met the energy minister Michael Shanks to discuss Grangemouth in particular.

The Grangemouth investment task force and Grangemouth future industry board continue to be fruitful vehicles for collaboration between the energy secretary and United Kingdom ministers. In May, I asked the Secretary of State for Business and Trade for a meeting to discuss wider issues in the Grangemouth cluster to jointly secure the future of Ineos Olefins & Polymers Europe (UK) at Grangemouth. The Minister of State for Industry responded to me on 29 August, and I very much look forward to having that discussion in due course.

Michelle Thomson: The cabinet secretary has alluded to concerns that are increasingly being raised about contagion as a result of the impact of UK Government policies on the energy sector. My immediate concerns are the vital chemical cluster around Grangemouth, but I am also concerned about the throughput of the Forties pipeline and, therefore, ultimate viability. It is also clear that the energy profit levy is biting investment hard, and I find it staggering that there is no sign of the promised £200 million—paltry though that may be—from the UK Government. I know that discussions have been had, but is the cabinet secretary any clearer on whether the UK Government plans to follow through on the promises that have been made and, consequently, on timescales?

Kate Forbes: Michelle Thomson has raised a number of important issues, and I will start with the wider cluster. We are very conscious of the challenges faced by the wider chemicals business. I meet the chief executive of Ineos O&P Europe (UK) monthly to provide the business with an opportunity to update me on how global market pressures in the wider energy landscape are impacting on operations at Grangemouth. I am also engaging directly with the UK Government on those matters—indeed, I raise them at most of my meetings with the Secretary of State for Scotland—and I am pleased that the Scottish Government has been able to make some progress on the issue.

The member mentioned the energy profits levy. She will have seen my comments yesterday on the need for a very urgent replacement of that fiscal regime and on certainly not having to wait until 2030.

Lastly, the member talked about some of the wider opportunities that are emerging through project willow and how we unlock the National Wealth Fund commitment to funding. That is a particular priority at the moment. We know that some of those opportunities are far advanced. In fact, that was the nature of my conversation with Michael Shanks yesterday—looking at how we progress that to secure the funding and get the opportunities in place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on the Deputy First Minister's responsibilities, economy and Gaelic.

Finance and Local Government

Working-age Economic Inactivity

1. **Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on the public finances of working-age economic inactivity. (S6O-04874)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The Scottish Government routinely analyses the data on economic inactivity that is produced by the Office for National Statistics. Increasing economic participation can have economic and fiscal benefits, and a Scottish Government analysis that was published last October indicated that even a relatively small increase of 0.25 percentage points in the economic activity rate could boost gross domestic product in the long term by around 0.1 per cent—£180 million—each year.

That is why we are taking action across Government to support people to enter, remain in and progress in work through devolved employability services, health and work support and various commitments in the programme for government.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the minister for that comprehensive reply. Students are the largest cohort of economically inactive people in Scotland, where we have four-year degrees.

Of those people seeking work in Scotland, 72,000 received employability support from April 2022 to September 2024. Will the minister advise which programmes were most successful in returning people to work, what plans there are to roll out such programmes across the country, and the anticipated average annual boost to both the individual's and the nation's finances of each person who moves out of economic inactivity?

Ivan McKee: As I indicated, a whole range of programmes are in place. As was outlined in the programme for government, we have introduced specialist employability support across Scotland to enhance services for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions. Alongside that, we have improved the healthy working lives service and working health services Scotland to ensure that support is available for employees and employers who are managing health challenges in the workforce. Devolved employability services, which are backed by £90 million in 2025-26, play a pivotal role in supporting people towards and into sustainable fair work.

It is worth pointing out that the Deputy First Minister is working with Public Health Scotland and a range of private sector employers on pilot programmes to help to move those individuals back into work.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): A large proportion of those who are economically inactive are inactive because of ill health, and Scotland has a particularly poor record in that regard. When will the Scottish Government develop strategies along the preventative health agenda to prevent people from falling into ill health in the first place?

Ivan McKee: The data shows that economic inactivity in Scotland is 21.9 per cent, which shows a 1.4 per cent reduction since last year, so that number is moving in the right direction. It is worth pointing out that there are a range of reasons for economic inactivity, including in relation to students—as Kenny Gibson pointed out—and individuals who have retired or who are caring for family members at home. Around a third of that figure is due to ill health.

The work within the population health framework, along with the other work that my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care is taking forward, is very much targeted at how we join up economic activity with health-related support to get those individuals back into work. The work that the Deputy First Minister is taking forward—which I outlined—in conjunction with Public Health Scotland and private sector employers is also very much in that space.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Mental health issues, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism contribute to a significant proportion of cases among the 20-odd per cent of the working-age population who are economically inactive, but the national health service does not seem to have an effective pathway for ADHD and autism, and the waits for mental health services are incredibly long.

What discussions is the minister having with the health department to ensure that we can get the system ready in order that we can get those people back to work so that they can make an economic contribution to the country?

Ivan McKee: As I indicated, a range of activities are happening. My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care is working with the economy portfolio, Public Health Scotland and others to ensure that those services are joined up and are focused on returning people to work as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Ethical Divestment (Support for Public Bodies)

2. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support local authorities and other public bodies to apply ethical criteria when deciding whether to divest from sectors such as fossil fuels, arms

companies and businesses complicit in occupation or war crimes. (S6O-04875)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Local authorities are responsible for their pension investments, and pension scheme legislation requires them to publish a statement about their investment principles, which should include the extent of their environmental, social and ethical considerations. The Scottish Government has published a business investment framework and guidance on sustainable procurement, and the Scottish National Investment Bank has a responsible and ethical investment policy. There is also guidance for public bodies on carrying out due diligence checks on companies to see if they are associated with human rights abuses. Public bodies are responsible for deciding on their actions in individual cases.

Patrick Harvie: I lodged the question before I was aware that there would be a statement from the First Minister on such issues. I hope that that will touch on the question, and I look forward eagerly to hearing the detail of it.

Nevertheless, there is in Scotland local government legislation—to which my colleague Ross Greer drew the Scottish Government's attention over the recess—that places restrictions on local authorities applying ethical criteria in the way that I have set out. We are all, each of us, free to apply ethical criteria in our choices. Can the minister agree that there should be no reason in principle why decisions that are made collectively on behalf of us all should be restricted in the ethical criteria that they apply on the basis of the political views of democratically elected councillors?

Ivan McKee: First, the member is correct to say that there will be a statement by the First Minister later this afternoon. Clearly, members will have to wait and see what it contains, but—as Patrick Harvie identified—it will touch on some of those issues.

With regard to the principle, it is important to recognise that, in this area, there is a mixture of devolved and reserved competence and that, in order to have an effective policy, we need to be able to unpick that and understand the extent of devolved competence so that we can legislate accordingly. In principle, however, I do not disagree with Patrick Harvie's comments.

Public Bodies that Incur Substantial Legal Costs

3. **Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba):** To ask the Scottish Government what role the finance secretary has in authorising any continued expenditure of public bodies that incur substantial legal costs, including those covered by the clinical negligence and other risks indemnity scheme. (S6O-04876)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Public bodies, including those covered by the clinical negligence and other risks indemnity scheme, are responsible for making their own decisions, including those regarding expenditure and ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Scottish public finance manual, which is issued by Scottish ministers. Whether to pursue, defend or concede any legal claim is therefore a decision for the public body in question.

Ash Regan: Media reports of the NHS Fife tribunal highlight the escalating legal costs that will ultimately come from Scotland's national health service budget, and Scottish Borders Council recently lost a judicial review over a primary school's failure to provide single-sex toilets for pupils. Will the minister confirm whether he will look into that issue? All recipients of public funding, including local authorities, the third sector and public bodies such as the NHS and its central legal office, should surely be fully compliant with the Supreme Court judgment in For Women Scotland Ltd v the Scottish Ministers. Is the minister considering taking any action against those who fall short of the standards of lawful accountability for public finances? I am sure that the public would rightly expect that.

Ivan McKee: It would, of course, be inappropriate for me or for other Scottish Government ministers to intervene in or comment on on-going legal cases. That maintains the independence of the legal process.

As Ash Regan is aware, the scheme that we have referred to is set up to share risk across a range of organisations in order to minimise the impact from any specific case. It is important to note that the Scottish Government does not provide public authorities with legal advice and that it is up to each public authority to take its own independent legal advice. It is also important to recognise that the membership of the scheme is mandatory for all NHS Scotland health boards and that the costs of the majority of NHS Scotland's legal cases are met by the scheme.

Local Authorities (Transformation Programmes)

4. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with local authorities to deliver transformation programmes and accelerate any reforms needed to achieve financial sustainability and ensure that local services are fit for the future. (S6O-04877)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Alongside record funding, our public

service reform strategy, which was published in June, sets out how we are working with local government on programmes such as whole-family support and fairer futures partnerships to accelerate change and deliver services that are preventative, better joined up and more efficient. By tackling systemic barriers and empowering local leadership, we will ensure that services remain sustainable and fit for the future.

David Torrance: Will the minister provide reassurance that the Scottish Government will continue to work constructively with councils such as Fife Council, which serves my constituency, to support innovation, protect front-line services and ensure that communities such as Kirkcaldy benefit from sustainable, modernised local services?

Ivan McKee: Yes, I can categorically offer that reassurance. Along with the record funding settlement and early and meaningful budget engagement, the Scottish Government will continue to work in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities such as Fife Council on how to ensure that we provide sustainable, people-centred services.

We will also continue to engage constructively with the United Kingdom Government to highlight the importance of sustainable public services to ensure that the people of Scotland continue to receive the high-quality public services that they expect and deserve.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): The minister will be aware that Scottish National Party-run Dumfries and Galloway Council has withdrawn some key subsidised bus services as a result of what it describes as “funding constraints”, following a widespread review of the region’s bus network. From Sanquhar to Langholm, that is causing huge difficulty and distress for residents, young and old. Will the Scottish Government, as it prepares its next budget, commit to a full and fair funding formula for Scotland’s rural councils, and ensure that it properly funds Scotland’s at-risk rural bus network?

Ivan McKee: Of course, those decisions are for local authorities, but it is worth pointing out that the Scottish Government is providing record funding to local government in the current financial year. Discussions are under way—indeed, my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government is undertaking budget discussions at the moment—to make sure that we continue to offer ever-increasing amounts of funding to local government. The funding formula is a matter for COSLA, which, in conjunction with local authorities, decides how best to allocate that funding across the country.

Paul Sweeney: Is the minister open to the offer that was made by the UK Government to work in collaboration to strengthen public procurement rules, guidance and legislation to ensure that local authorities and the Scottish Government can drive greater value from procurement into local supply chains and that we get better value in the Scottish economy as a result?

Ivan McKee: We are always in the business of looking for opportunities to further improve in that area. However, it is worth recognising that, when we look at the specifics of what the UK Government is offering, we see that it is trying to catch up with where the Scottish Government already is on procurement rules and practice. The data shows that 46 per cent of public procurement spend in Scotland is with small and medium sized enterprises; that compares to around 25 per cent of spend south of the border.

We have made significant progress in that area in Scotland, and we continue to make it. I met with the Federation of Small Businesses during the past couple of weeks to talk about what else we can do, but as I said, it is the case that the UK Government is running to catch up to where Scotland already is.

Council Services (In-person Access)

5. **Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it can provide to local authorities to help ensure that all residents across the north-east can access local council services, including help when things go wrong, in person as well as online. (S6O-04878)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): During 2025-26, local authorities in north-east Scotland will receive more than £1.8 billion to fund local services, which equates to an extra £120 million—or 7 per cent—to support vital day-to-day services compared with 2024-25.

Local authorities are independent corporate bodies with their own powers and responsibilities. However, the Scottish Government will continue to work in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities to ensure that the people of Scotland continue to receive the high-quality public services that they expect and deserve.

Maggie Chapman: Dundee Pensioners Forum and other organisations are calling for the re-establishment of face-to-face access to local council offices. Limited access has curtailed communities’ opportunities to address potentially complex issues, such as those relating to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete and those associated with the maintenance of homes and the surrounding environment. It also excludes, in

particular, those with limited access to information technology or skills. How will the Scottish Government work with councils to enhance that aspect of community engagement to ensure that all residents—regardless of digital access or skills—can get support when they need it?

Ivan McKee: I am not aware of the specific situation in Dundee that the member refers to. However, the Scottish Government is focused on digital inclusion through its digital strategy and on ensuring that everybody is able to enjoy service provision using digital services is part of that process. Of course, when there are reasons why that is not possible, public bodies should continue to provide services face to face when that is most appropriate. The situation in Dundee is a matter for the council there.

Social Care Services (East Dunbartonshire)

6. **Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it has allocated to East Dunbartonshire Council to help meet any additional costs of providing social care services for an ageing population. (S6O-04879)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): East Dunbartonshire Council will receive revenue funding of £280.6 million in 2025-26 as a result of the Scottish budget. It is for the council, as a democratically elected body, to determine how to allocate that funding, including funding for social care services, on the basis of local needs and priorities.

We appreciate the pressures that are faced by the health and social care sector and by local government. That is why we provided record funding for both during 2025-26, including almost £2.2 billion of investment for social care and integration.

Rona Mackay: With nearly 18,000 people in Strathkelvin and Bearsden—my constituency—now over the state pension age and with estimates showing that 15 per cent of local pensioners are living in poverty, with more than £1.4 million in pension credit going unclaimed every year, does the minister agree that raising awareness of poverty-reducing benefits is crucial, as is high-quality, sustainable social care?

Ivan McKee: I agree with the member. That is why we have a benefit take-up strategy, to which there is no United Kingdom Government equivalent. We are taking steps to tackle barriers to take up and we are putting money in the pockets of those who need it most. In 2025-26, we allocated £16.9 million to fund advice services, including Citizens Advice Scotland's money talk team, which supported more than 12,000 older people last year. Similarly, it is likely that we will all use social care at some point in our lives, and improving the quality, standards and consistency of care for people is absolutely necessary.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): The East Dunbartonshire health and social care partnership has highlighted in its 2025 to 2030 strategic plan that there is a need to move away from traditional service models to a whole person and community approach due to financial challenges and increasing demand. In April, council tax for East Dunbartonshire residents rose by 13 per cent. This summer, the people I spoke to at their doors said that they are not receiving value for money. What is the minister's response to all those who are paying more but risk receiving less when it comes to social care?

Ivan McKee: First, those decisions are made locally and, as I have indicated, record funding is going into the system across local government and social care.

The member made an important point in the first part of her question about how to deliver those services most effectively, which gets to the heart of the work that we are taking forward in the public service reform strategy. The work builds on the Christie principles to focus on prevention and ensure that the money is most effectively directed to the front line to better integrate public services so that her constituents and others across the country receive the best possible service from local government.

Public Services (Empowering Local Communities)

7. **Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to encourage and support local authorities to empower and enable people and communities to have a greater say over the delivery of local public services. (S6O-04880)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Through our joint commitment with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to the democracy matters process, we are designing new community decision-making arrangements. That aims to increase participation and enhance the role of communities in local service delivery. We are also providing funding for the new city citizens assembly pilot in Mr Rowley's constituency, led by the Electoral Reform Society and Fife Council, to enable people to have a greater influence over the future of Scotland's newest city. That is alongside support for local authorities to mainstream participation through the delivery of participatory budgeting and our recent review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

I will correct myself—the pilot is in Ms Somerville's constituency, and Mr Rowley is a regional member.

Alex Rowley: The Scottish National Party Government published the Christie report back in 2011. The report's main recommendations focused on reforming public services in Scotland through empowerment, collaboration, prevention and performance-focused efficiency. It recommended empowering individuals and communities in service design, promoting integrated services through partnerships, prioritising preventative measures and holding services accountable for improving outcomes and value for money. Some 14 years later, in my opinion, very little of what the Christie report set out has been achieved. Indeed, I would argue that the centralisation of public services over that period is a complete contradiction to what the Christie report set out.

Do the minister and the Government accept that they have failed to implement the Christie recommendations? Will they therefore look at how we can genuinely empower local authorities to take power out of the Parliament into local authorities, so that they can take that power into communities? That has failed.

Ivan McKee: I agree with the first part of the member's question but not with the second part. The Christie principles are absolutely central to the work that the Government is taking forward. I am sure that the member has read in great detail the public service reform strategy that we published in June, which contains many examples of where those principles have been effectively applied across a whole range of policy areas, including prevention, empowerment, integration and more effective and efficient service delivery. We continue on that journey, and the public service reform strategy gives us clear direction, through its 18 workstreams, as to how we do that.

As I have already indicated, the Government is taking forward democracy matters work in collaboration with local authority partners at COSLA on how we take the empowerment and service design agenda down to the community level. To make that as local as possible is hugely important. I indicated that the work on the citizens assembly in Dunfermline, which is funded by the Scottish Government, is very much part of that work. However, I am always happy to engage with any member—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister.

Ivan McKee: —who wants to contribute to taking the agenda forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. I am keen to squeeze in the last question.

Agency Staff (Scottish Government Expenditure)

8. **Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason it is reportedly spending over £1 million every week on agency staff, in light of its having announced plans to reduce corporate costs. (S6O-04881)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): In support of the budget and the wider public service reform agenda, the Scottish Government is proactively addressing the need to control workforce size to remain fiscally sustainable. Within the core Scottish Government, the number of contingent workers is now 47 per cent lower than in March 2022.

The use of contingent workers has been in decline in order to support a more managed approach to workforce deployment and to reduce cost. Employing temporary and agency workers provides the flexibility that is required to meet business needs, access specialist and other skills quickly and adapt where a need for a resource is short term. When services might be required for only a short time, it is very often the most cost-effective way of providing them, rather than employing someone full time.

Alexander Stewart: Does the minister accept that every pound that is spent on agency staff bureaucracy is a pound that is taken away from our schools, hospitals and local council services, which are already on their knees because of this Government's mismanagement?

Ivan McKee: Alexander Stewart will be aware that the Scottish Government works within a fixed budget and balances its budget every year. The whole point of the public service reform agenda is to continue to move resources from the corporate functions and to deploy them to the front line in exactly the way that he has talked about. The strategy contains a number of examples of ways in which we have successfully done that. I have just cited the example of the number of contingent workers, which is 47 per cent lower than it was three years ago. We will continue to deliver on that agenda in order to free up those resources and ensure that they are deployed effectively in an integrated way on the front line.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on finance and local government. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Gaza

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on the situation in Gaza. The First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:52

The First Minister (John Swinney): The situation in Gaza is a man-made humanitarian catastrophe. Over 63,000 people in Gaza have been killed and many more have been maimed. Most of the strip lies in ruins, and famine now grips the population. In a compelling address to the United Nations Security Council on 27 August, Joyce Msuya, the UN's deputy humanitarian chief, advised that famine had been confirmed in north-central Gaza, where Gaza City is located, and that it is expected to spread to the south by the end of this month.

The scale of suffering is unimaginable. Nobody can ignore it. We must confront this crisis with urgency, compassion and an unwavering commitment to accountability. I know that colleagues across this Parliament share my horror at what is unfolding in Gaza.

This Government has consistently and unequivocally condemned the terrorist attacks that were carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023, which claimed the lives of over 1,200 Israelis and saw 251 hostages taken. We have joined the international community in demanding the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. All human life is equal, Israeli and Palestinian alike.

We have repeatedly called for an immediate and sustained ceasefire by all parties—a call that was endorsed by this Parliament on 21 November 2023—and for humanitarian aid to flow unrestricted into the territory. We have urged the United Kingdom Government to recognise the state of Palestine within the 1967 borders, joining over 140 UN member states—a number that is growing—and aligning with the international consensus on a two-state solution.

Although I welcome the intent behind the UK Government's decision to recognise a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly this month, recognition must not be conditional and should be irreversible. It is the right of Palestinians, not the gift of international powers, and it must be backed by sanctions against the Israeli Government.

A two-state solution is the only way that Palestinian and Israeli peoples can have a future, living side by side in peace and security. The Palestinian people and the Israeli people deserve no less. The Government of Israel has, however, overtly rejected that position, announcing another massive illegal settlement in the West Bank, with Israel's finance minister explicitly claiming that the development would

"bury the idea of a Palestinian state".

On Monday, I spoke to Dr Husam Zomlot, the head of the Palestinian Mission in London. He described how settler violence and land grabs in the West Bank are accelerating and how it looks different to even two years ago, with Palestinian towns and cities behind barbed wire and walls, and with roadblocks choking mobility across the territory. He told me that the economy was being choked, with unemployment at around 50 per cent. He was convinced that the aim of the activity was, as the Israeli finance minister set out, to end the prospect of a Palestinian state.

The Israeli security cabinet's decision to seize Gaza City last month has been condemned by the United Kingdom, the majority of the UN Security Council and senior UN figures. However, again, the Israeli Government has paid no heed. We need to act. The UK Government needs to act.

I am therefore calling for the immediate recognition of the Palestinian state, strengthened sanctions against those who are complicit in illegal settlements and the imposition of sanctions on the members of the Israeli security cabinet where they are complicit in the horrors that civilians in Gaza City face.

I welcomed the UK Government's announcement in May that it had suspended trade negotiations with Israel, but it is clear that that action has made no difference. It is therefore time for the United Kingdom to withdraw from the UK-Israel free trade agreement, in view of Israel's behaviour. I am also calling on the UK Government to follow the example of Ireland and to prohibit the import of goods produced in Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

This Government has contributed to humanitarian responses to the Gaza crisis—to date, we have contributed £1.3 million for Gaza and the wider middle east. In November 2023, we provided £750,000 to support access to food, water, shelter and medical supplies for more than 670,000 displaced people. More recently, we provided £550,000 for the Disasters Emergency Committee middle east appeal, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and Mercy Corps.

We welcome the fact that the UK Government has committed to supporting the evacuation of Gazan students who have been awarded places at Scottish universities.

For some time, I have been calling for the UK to end arms sales to Israel. The UK Government's decision to suspend some arms licences was welcome, but I believe that it should go further. All licensed arms exports should stop.

I said recently that I share the concerns of other countries and international leaders that a genocide appears to be unfolding in Gaza. I did not make that claim lightly. The legal determination of genocide is the responsibility of international courts, and the International Court of Justice found a prima facie case that Israel was committing genocide.

Under article II of the 1948 genocide convention, two conditions must be met for genocide to be established. The first is that specific acts such as killing,

"causing serious bodily or mental harm",

or inflicting life conditions calculated to destroy a group have occurred. The second is that those acts were carried out with the

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

Credible, widely documented evidence suggests that both of those conditions may be present in Israel's conduct in Gaza. More than 63,000 Palestinians—the majority of them civilians, including more than 15,000 children—have been killed since October 2023. Vital infrastructure, including hospitals, homes, schools and water systems, have been systematically destroyed. Access to food, water and medical aid has been obstructed. The entire population has faced repeated forced displacement, often under life-threatening conditions.

Statements by senior Israeli officials include dehumanising language and express intent to eliminate Gaza. Defence minister Yoav Gallant described Palestinians as "human animals". Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu invoked the biblical command "remember Amalek", which is historically associated with collective annihilation. The finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, said that Gaza would be "entirely destroyed" and that its civilians would be relocated to a humanitarian zone in the south before they would leave their homeland.

Those statements have been cited in South Africa's legal submissions to the International Court of Justice. International legal scholars have argued that they help to establish the specific intent that is required for a finding of genocide under the convention.

Governments must act now. Our neighbours in Ireland were the first Government in the European Union to say that what the Israeli Government is doing is genocide, when the Taoiseach told the Dáil on 28 May that the Israeli government was "committing genocide in Gaza". The UN special rapporteur Francesca Albanese concluded in March 2024 that

"there are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of ... genocide against Palestinians ... in Gaza has been met."

In April 2025, the UN humanitarian chief, Tom Fletcher, stated:

"This is not a war for security. It is a war to erase a people. And our failure to stop it will haunt our generation, and history."

The United Kingdom Government should support the international rule of law, join South Africa's case at the ICJ and commit to implementing the ICC arrest warrants. The UK must end military co-operation with the Israeli Government while the war continues and the question of genocide remains current.

I want to directly address accusations that that opinion could be seen as antisemitic. Let me be clear: I utterly reject antisemitism and all forms of racism and hatred. I stand with Scotland's Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian communities, and I condemn all forms of antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism. I recognise the trauma experienced by those communities and I pledge as First Minister to ensure their safety and dignity.

On Monday, I met members of Scotland's Jewish community. I did so because I wanted to reassure them of the respect that I have for the contribution that the community makes to all aspects of Scottish life. They are an integral part of Scotland's story, and they are a valued and cherished community in Scotland. However, I recognise that events in the middle east—and reactions to those events here, in Scotland—cause anxiety for members of our Jewish community, irrespective of their individual views on the conflict. I also know that members of our community have been affected by Hamas's terrorism in the worst possible way, and I again pay tribute to the memory of Bernard Cowan.

My condemnation of this Israeli Government's actions is grounded in international law, human rights and a belief in the equal value of every human life. Many Jewish organisations and individuals have condemned the assault on Gaza. Their courage reminds us that to speak out against mass violence is not antisemitic; it is deeply human. In fact, to speak out is our moral and legal responsibility.

The challenge for this Parliament, this Government, the United Kingdom Government and governments across the world is what action we should we take if we agree that we are witnessing an unfolding genocide. I have spoken about the actions that I am calling on the UK

Government to take, but let me turn now to what this Government will do. We are instructing relevant delivery bodies, where possible, not to provide support in facilitating trade between Scotland and Israel.

The UK has treaty obligations and duties in international law to respond appropriately when a situation involving a serious risk of genocide arises. The ministerial code, under which I operate, at section 1.7 lays a clear responsibility on all ministers to comply with

"international law and treaty obligations".

The International Court of Justice has made it plain that that risk exists. It has said that there is a prima facie case of genocide in Gaza. The Scottish Government cannot ignore that.

We have previously provided business grants and investment support to companies that are involved in the design, production, supply and support of military equipment, technologies and services. We do so because we recognise that defending our country and defending our continent is a duty of Government. I hope that anyone watching the war in Ukraine would recognise the importance of defence. Indeed, the invasion shows that we live in a world in which our national security faces much greater and more immediate threats. In recognition of the changed international landscape, the Scottish Government will lift the restriction that we have applied on the use of support for the production of munitions.

However, in the face of genocide there can be no business as usual. We will pause new awards of public money to arms companies whose products or services are provided to countries when there is plausible evidence of genocide being committed by those countries. That will include Israel. The pause will apply, where possible, to new grants provided or investments made by the Scottish Government, our enterprise agencies and the Scottish National Investment Bank. Any defence company that is seeking support from the Scottish Government will have to demonstrate that its products are not involved militarily with Israel.

The UK Government should review what other steps it must now take in view of the United Kingdom's duty in international law to respond when there is a serious risk of genocide. Ultimately, the International Court of Justice must come to a determination in the case against the Israeli Government of genocide. Until we have that clarity, new public moneys should not go to arms companies that are involved with the Israeli military.

I know that there will be people in Scotland, not least apprentices funded by the Scottish Government who are working on the Clyde, at Rosyth and elsewhere, asking,"What does this mean for me?" Let me be clear: we have made a legally binding commitment to those young people and it will be honoured. Anyone who is in an apprenticeship or who has a formal offer will continue to be funded in their current place for the full duration of the apprenticeship.

This is a humanitarian crisis and Scotland will directly address that humanitarian need. We have a long history of helping those in desperate need and we will not be found wanting now. I can announce that we will provide £400,000 to Kids Operating Room to establish the Gaza HOPES—healthcare for obstetrics, paediatrics, emergency, and surgical care—field readiness hub in Scotland. The funding will help to unlock $15 million of additional funding to deliver a rapidly deployable hospital in Gaza. Designed in Scotland to be built in just a week, it can operate in the most challenging environments and last for decades. It will provide essential surgical, maternity and paediatric services to thousands of patients every year. The hub, or pilot hospital, will be co-ordinated from Dundee and will support similar deployments in future crises.

We will also donate £600,000 to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led humanitarian fund for the occupied Palestinian territories, which will provide life-saving health services, food and nutrition assistance, emergency shelter, water and sanitation, protection services, education support and cash for families, ensuring that aid reaches those who are most at risk.

We have also committed to providing medical support for up to 20 injured children from Gaza. We expect the first arrivals, along with their families, in mid-September.

Although there are significant challenges in relocating human rights defenders such as journalists from Gaza at this time, we are determined to do what we can, and we will explore that and other ways of supporting their vital work at pace.

We will also support those who are struggling for justice, however distant a prospect that currently seems. We are exploring practical measures to bring expertise within Scotland's legal establishment, our universities and our civil society, to contribute to gathering and preserving evidence that might be used in international criminal cases.

We are witnessing a humanitarian disaster of historic proportions, yet the bombs continue to fall. The world cannot wait for a final court ruling before acting. The signs are clear and the alarm has been raised. The bombs and rockets must stop and humanitarian aid must flow.

The international community, including the United Kingdom Government, must recognise a Palestinian state as the first step towards peace and a two-state solution in which the peoples of both Israel and Palestine can live side-by-side in peace and security.

Acknowledging that we are witnessing the signs of genocide brings with it a responsibility to act. The people of Scotland expect no less of us. For the duration of this afternoon's business, I have authorised that the Palestinian flag be raised outside St Andrew's house as an indication of Scotland's solidarity with the people of Palestine. Scotland will always raise her voice in favour of peace and humanity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The First Minister will take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 30 minutes for that, after which we will need to move to the next item of business. I encourage members wishing to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button if they have not already done so.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): We must never forget the horrors of 7 October 2023: the rape, murder and kidnap of innocent Israelis at the hands of Hamas terrorists. We are all deeply disturbed by the horrors of what is happening in Gaza, with so many innocent civilians—adults and children—being killed while others starve. The events in the middle east are a blight on humanity.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the First Minister's feelings, but I also believe that the Scottish Parliament should focus the powers that it has on improving people's lives in Scotland. Issues here need our full and urgent attention. Drug death rates in Scotland are the worst in Europe for the seventh consecutive year. Many communities live in fear of serious violence. Lives are being lost due to chronic problems in the national health service. I would rather that Mr Swinney provided a statement on those issues, for which he has responsibility.

However, since this statement is before us, I will ask John Swinney about his demand to immediately recognise Palestinian statehood. That will be seen by many people as premature, impractical and counterproductive. [*Interruption*.] John Swinney says that he has spoken with Scotland's proud and valued Jewish community in an attempt to allay their concerns. What does he expect their reaction will be to his statement today?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the First Minister, I remind members that, as emotional as this topic might be, we have listened to the First Minister with respect and we will listen to others who have questions with the same respect.

The First Minister: I agree with Russell Findlay that we should never forget what happened on 7 October 2023, and I agree with him that we should never forget what is going on in Gaza now, which has been going on for a considerable time.

I willingly accept my responsibility for the issues for which I have responsibility. I was here, in the chamber, leading a debate on those questions yesterday; I will be here tomorrow, answering First Minister's questions, as I do every Thursday; and I will appear here whenever the Parliament asks me to do so to account for my actions. Some of my responsibilities are covered in the statement, which is about the way in which our enterprise agencies operate—that is my responsibility. I have to explain to the Parliament the approaches that we are taking.

On the question of the recognition of the Palestinian state, I do not think that it is premature; it is long overdue, to be honest—long overdue by multiple decades.

Finally, I met the Jewish community on Monday. I did so to explain to them face to face what I was thinking about the way in which this issue had to be handled. It is not the first time that I have met the community; I have had regular meetings with it. I am certain that the community will be disappointed by some of the things that I have said today. I am not in any doubt about that. However, I have to look at the situation in Gaza, and I have to think about the responsibility that my ministers carry to act within the law. That has underpinned the central decision that I have announced today. As First Minister, I am expected to operate within the law, as are my ministers—and I expect it of them. The current situation in relation to the case of genocide puts ministers in a position in which, if we do not take the actions that I am taking today, we could be at risk of not operating within the law.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): The situation in Gaza is beyond intolerable: the deliberate starvation of children, the killing of innocent civilians trying to access aid and the collective punishment of a population with tens of thousands being killed and schools, hospitals and lives being destroyed. We need the bloodshed to stop right now. There must be an immediate ceasefire, the free flow of humanitarian assistance, the release of hostages so that they are back with their families where they belong, and a pathway to a two-state solution with lasting peace.

I am clear that Benjamin Netanyahu is a war criminal and is clearly breaching international law. He is more interested in staying in power and out of jail than in peace, and he must be held to account and face justice for his actions.

Let me also be clear that Hamas is a terrorist organisation that committed brutal atrocities on 7 October 2023, and it, too, has no interest in peace.

The people of Palestine and Israel deserve to live in peace, freedom and security. Diplomacy, international engagement and building partnerships to work towards peace matter. That is why I welcome the significant decision by the UK Government that we will recognise a Palestinian state before the UN General Assembly this month—a move made alongside allied nations such as France, Australia, Canada and Belgium.

Does the First Minister agree with the actions taken by the UK Labour Government to remove the block on the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice; to remove the block on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East—UNRWA—and restore its funding; to introduce project pure hope to evacuate injured Gazan children and treat them here in the UK; and to sanction Israeli ministers who have incited settler violence?

This has gone on too long. The world has failed. The illegal occupation and genocide must end now.

The First Minister: I very much welcome the comments made by Mr Sarwar. I agree with his characterisation of the situation in Gaza. I agree with his description of Hamas as a terrorist organisation that is not interested in peace, and I agree with his call for there to be an international focus on the use of international institutions to deliver peace, freedom and security in the middle east.

The steps taken by the United Kingdom Government have been welcome. I have set out in my statement where I believe they should go further but, where they have come, they are welcome. We are actively engaged with the UK Government on the transport of some children from Gaza to the UK, and Scotland will play a part in providing healthcare to support those children and their families. We are having constructive discussions about the ability to support students from Gaza to come to Scotland and the UK as a consequence of the arrangements that are being put in place.

I want us to act with as much solidarity and agreement as we can, because only by the collective endeavours of us all can we possibly apply pressure on the Israeli Government and Prime Minister Netanyahu to reverse this disastrous course and protect the people of Gaza. They have suffered unbearably, and it must come to an end.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Israel is an apartheid state. It has occupied Palestinian land and brutalised the Palestinian people for almost 80 years. Over the past two years, it has systematically slaughtered the people of Gaza—a genocide. I am glad that the Scottish Government has finally accepted the Scottish Greens' proposal to end all public funding for Israel's arms dealers. That sets an example for nations around Europe and the world to follow. However, we can and must go further. When Putin brutally and illegally invaded Ukraine, the Scottish Government rightly and immediately called on every Scottish business to sever all ties and cease all trade with Russia. Palestinian lives are worth no less than Ukrainian or Scottish lives. Will the First Minister take the opportunity this afternoon to make that same call? Will he ask every business in Scotland to join the global boycott against apartheid Israel?

The First Minister: The comments that I have made in my statement set out the range of interventions that the Scottish Government can take—the very significant range of interventions that we can take within our power. Part of that involves the approach that we are taking on international trade. We are making it clear that the Scottish Government will not support the development, encouragement or nurturing of international trade. That is the correct approach for us to take so that we are focused entirely on using our influence and resources to ensure that the conflict is brought to an end.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Given the historical responsibility that we hold in Great Britain for the desperate situation that is unfolding in Palestine, both of our Governments have a duty and an obligation to act, or we should deserve to have the images of the children of Gaza haunt us for 100 years.

The people of Gaza and of Israel are now governed by regimes that operate only in their own hate-filled interests, at devastating humanitarian cost, both to the remaining Israeli hostages and to the citizens of Gaza.

I am gratified to hear the First Minister talk of the Government's support for KidsOR, an organisation that I have hosted in the Parliament. I welcome the announcement that 20 children will be brought to Scotland to receive NHS care. What scope will there be to expand that number, given the unfolding humanitarian disaster in that benighted land?

The First Minister: I welcome the comments that Mr Cole-Hamilton makes. I have visited KidsOR in Dundee; it is an organisation that has deployed medical care on an incredibly sophisticated level in difficult and challenging circumstances. Its intervention has been very welcome, and I am glad that we are able to support it in the way that we can. I admire the organisation enormously.

In relation to the provision of medical care through the NHS, we are working collaboratively with the UK Government on that question. Mr Cole-Hamilton will appreciate that there are all sorts of visa and transfer issues that must be arranged. We cannot do that unilaterally; we have to do it in co-operation with the UK Government, and I welcome the engagement that we have had with the UK Government on pursuing that issue. The answer to his question is that we are willing to be as helpful as we can to as many families as possible, but the number of children and families that we can support will be determined by the collaboration with the UK Government.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Over the past few months, we have seen mass starvation in Gaza—denied by the Israeli Government—bombing of hospitals and the murder of innocent journalists. An estimated 63,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli Government. I know that the First Minister agrees that that is genocide, but should the Scottish Government be supporting a total boycott of Israeli goods, extensive sanctions on the state of Israel and a complete ban on arms sales to Israel?

The First Minister: What I have tried to do today is set out the range of actions that are within the powers of the Scottish Government. I have explored that issue extensively to maximise the effectiveness of the intervention that we can make, because of the gravity of the situation that Mr McLennan recounts. The steps that have been set out are designed to provide the maximum response that we can make in Scotland to the situation that we face. Of course, we will consider whatever steps emerge in the fullness of time.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): The First Minister will understand that there will be differences between us on some aspects of the actions that he has outlined this afternoon. Will he join Scottish politicians of several parties who have drawn a distinction between the state of Israel and the present Government of Israel with its Netanyahu Administration? Israel is a democracy in which, at successive elections, a majority has not voted in favour of Mr Netanyahu's Government or some of the extreme coalition partners in it. The conflation in language, in talking of the state of Israel and its prosecution of the atrocities in Gaza, is one that is used by others who have a much more malign intent towards the state of Israel itself.

The First Minister: I hope that, in my statement, I set out my absolute view that there needs to be a peaceful settlement in the middle east, in which the state of Israel and a Palestinian state can exist side by side, and that they can live in peace and security in the fashion that I discussed with Mr Sarwar a moment ago.

I acknowledge that there is a difference between the actions of the Netanyahu Government and the actions of all the people of Israel. There is clearly a difference between those two elements, and it is important. The Netanyahu Government is in command of the government of Israel. It is that Government that is prosecuting the situation in Gaza. That is the Government that needs to be held to account. That is the Government that needs to change course. All the actions that I am setting out and endorsing or encouraging are designed to have that purpose.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have many constituents who show up, week after week, to vigils and protests for Palestine, adding their voice to those of the many Scots who oppose the genocide that is happening in Gaza. I know that the Scottish Government has previously engaged with Gaza Families Reunited to lend support to pushing for the UK Government to open safe routes for those who have family already in Scotland to join that family—something that is personally affecting many of those whom I have met in Inverness at protests outside the town house. Can the First Minister give any update on that work?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government has contacted the United Kingdom Government. In November 2024, the Minister for Equalities wrote to the UK Government on behalf of Gaza Families Reunited to encourage the establishment of a scheme to reunite families from Gaza that would be similar to the scheme that we had in place in relation to Ukraine. The UK Government has not agreed to such a proposition, but the on-going awfulness of the situation and the concerns of families that Emma Roddick has put to me demonstrate the need for us to continue to press for such an approach to be taken to ensure that we do all that we can to support individuals who have been affected by the crisis.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The Palestinian people will rejoice about the fact that their national flag is flying over Government buildings, but does the First Minister agree with my view that the situation that we are discussing is no longer a war but is ethnic cleansing that amounts to genocide, with Israel having the clear intent of occupying the land in question?

I welcome the fact that the Government will try to bring 20 children here for emergency treatment. I have tried to help a young girl, Lamar, who is in danger of losing her limbs if she does not get treatment. The big issue is how we evacuate those Palestinians from Gaza. Can the First Minister say any more about how we will get those people out of Gaza so that they can get the emergency treatment that they so desperately need?

The First Minister: I agree with Pauline McNeill that the situation is no longer a war; it stopped being a war a long time ago. Her description of what is happening in Gaza as genocide accurately describes what is going on, so I agree with her characterisation of the process that is under way as ethnic cleansing.

I know how substantially Pauline McNeill will be acting to help the young girl who she mentioned. She raised the practical difficulties that exist, which are tied up with the fact that we have no effective humanitarian routes of engagement in Gaza at present. That is entirely at the hand of the Israeli Government.

During the summer, I met representatives of UNICEF, who told me about the volume of aid that is sitting within viewing distance of the people of Gaza but which cannot get there because of the actions of the Israeli Government. It is critical that international pressure and our collaboration with the UK Government help to sustain the humanitarian effort to create the corridors and the pathways that will enable us to support young people such as the young person to whom Pauline McNeill referred.

I assure Pauline McNeill that we are actively engaged in trying to find solutions, but that will depend on the pressure that can be applied by the international community to create the necessary pathways.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Will the First Minister comment on the number of journalists who have been killed during the conflict? Two hundred and forty-seven have been killed, which is more than have been killed in every conflict since the first world war. Does he agree that people in the media must be allowed to continue to tell the world the stories of what is happening in Gaza?

The First Minister: I share the concern that Mr Adam has expressed. It is important that there is open and dispassionate analysis of what is going on in Gaza. That will be an essential source of information for the International Criminal Court proceedings and the considerations of the International Court of Justice.

I mourn the loss of all lives in the conflict. I mourn the loss of journalists' lives, because journalists are able to share with us the truth of what is happening. At an event just before the end of the recess, I was reminded of a quote by the late former Presiding Officer George Reid, who, in a debate on the Iraq war in this Parliament in 2003, said that the first victim of the war was the truth. That relates directly to the comment that Mr Adam has put to me. On this occasion, it is important that we remember the fine and distinguished words of one of the greatest colleagues I have ever had, George Reid, who gave us an insight into the dangers that Mr Adam has raised with me today.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The crimes of Israel against the Palestinian people demand concrete action from the international community, such as the welcome pause in awards to arms companies outlined by the First Minister. Boycott, divestment and sanctions are a peaceful and effective way to encourage compliance with international law. Will he instruct his Government to ensure that it is deploying against Israel, and all those profiting from the genocide, every single non-violent punitive measure at its disposal until such a time as Israel ends its brutal, violent and illegal occupation of Palestine, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity?

The First Minister: I have set out a package of measures in the economic, humanitarian and diplomatic space that are within my responsibilities to undertake. I have explored with my ministerial colleagues extensively the range of options that are available to us, and the product of that analysis is what Parliament has before it today. I must act in a lawful fashion at all times. It is an essential obligation, as I set out in the statement that I have given to Parliament today. I reassure Ruth Maguire that every step that I can take is being taken.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): In an earlier answer, I heard the First Minister discuss the amount of aid that sits waiting on the border, within touching distance of those civilians who need it. Does he share my dismay at the inability of the UN and the international community to collaborate to deliver such vital supplies to the population of Gaza who so desperately need it?

The First Minister: With respect, I do not think that that is the problem. The organisations that I have spoken to have given me a very clear outline of the arrangements that they have in place, and they have a track record of delivering aid. What is necessary is a safe pathway to do so. There are people who are being killed when they are going to get aid at some of the existing aid arrangements. That illustrates that it is, in certain circumstances, unsafe for people even to access aid that is managing to reach them. We need safe and humanitarian routes to get that aid there. It is close at hand, but it needs safety to get there.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To call out the Israeli Government's deadly actions in the Gaza and West Bank genocide, which I have done on many occasions in articles, is not antisemitic. Indeed, many in the Jewish diaspora are equally appalled. In Israel, dissent in relation to Netanyahu's actions is suppressed.

I note the call on the UK Government to prohibit the import of goods from Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, but I suggest that the UK goes further and prohibits imports from Israel itself. Devolution has its limits, but individuals like me in Scotland have not, and it is my intention to boycott those imports in the meantime.

The First Minister: As Christine Grahame knows, and recounts in her question, there are devolved and reserved responsibilities that apply to these issues. There is a free trade agreement between the United Kingdom and Israel, which I do not think should be maintained, because of the situation in Gaza. That relates to many of the issues that Christine Grahame puts to me, which would be resolved if we were to take a different course in the United Kingdom about that engagement with Israel on trade.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Like my colleague George Adam, I am very concerned about the number of journalists who have been killed in Gaza.

When I graduated with a degree in journalism, I left the university building with an absolute knowledge in my heart that my job would be to go out into the world and bear witness and hold a mirror up to the world to show exactly what is happening.

What we are seeing in Gaza is not collateral damage but a pattern. Will the First Minister join me in emphatically condemning those killings? Will he make urgent representations to the UK Government and international bodies to demand action to stop the killing of journalists and to secure accountability from those responsible? After all, deliberate attacks against journalists during an armed conflict constitute a war crime.

The First Minister: I could not have made the point more powerfully than Elena Whitham has made it. It is important—it is critical—that journalists are able to share with the world what is going on in Gaza. It is essential for that very purpose of openness and truthfulness that is to be the heart of media reporting; however, it is also important, for the issues that I raised in relation to the International Criminal Court proceedings and the work of the International Court of Justice, to ensure that what is happening in Gaza is understood and is a part of the understanding of the suffering of the people of Gaza.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): To aid the humanitarian effort, the Scottish Government could further activate its soft power to promote, for example, expertise at the University of Dundee, notably in the areas of groundwater aquifer utilisation to support the supply of drinking water, and cutting-edge research in housing and community design for those who are temporarily displaced. Will the First Minister consider that?

The First Minister: I would be happy to consider that.

In his question, Mr Golden has highlighted some of the great strengths that exist in the University of Dundee, of which I am very proud and which are an essential part of what has been deployed on other occasions in other circumstances around the world. He has made a very good and strong point. However, it comes back to the context in which those strengths could be deployed. There needs to be peace; there needs to be an approach that means that those skills can be deployed safely. That is what we are lacking just now. The necessity of a peaceful outcome is critical to enabling Mr Golden's very good suggestions to take their course.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): First Minister, given that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other humanitarian organisations have declared that famine is taking place in Gaza and that at least 158 people died of starvation during August, what steps is the Scottish Government taking, further to what you said in your original comments, to address that humanitarian crisis? Although I recognise that the obstruction is the responsibility of the Israeli Government and the Israel Defense Forces, how is the Scottish Government pressing the UK Government to take even more urgent action, both in increasing aid and in using diplomatic and political pressure to ensure that food and medical supplies can reach civilians without obstruction, particularly while the unforgivable, deliberate starving of children continues in the on-going genocide in Gaza?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

The First Minister: The issues that Mr Dornan has raised are central to the debate. I assure him that I have used every opportunity in dialogue with the Prime Minister to advance the discussion with the United Kingdom Government. The Prime Minister has been entirely willing to engage on the question, and I welcome that. I have written to the Prime Minister today, setting out the various propositions and proposals that I have explained to the Parliament. I would welcome further dialogue with the UK Government to advance those issues and to enable me to convey to the Prime Minister the sentiments of the Scottish Parliament—which will, of course, be debated in the debate that is about to commence and which are important in contributing to the thinking of the UK Government on the actions that it needs to take in that respect.

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

Palestine

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-18686, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Palestine.

15:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government has, since the start of the conflict, repeatedly called for a ceasefire and for the unfettered flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. We have also condemned unreservedly Hamas's brutality in October 2023, including the murder of the Scottish Jew Bernard Cowan, and have called for hostages to be released. Hamas must have no future in Gaza. We have called on the United Kingdom to end arms sales to Israel and to ensure that there is accountability for those who are responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity.

The First Minister has made it clear that the Scottish Government shares the concern of other Governments and international leaders that genocide appears to be unfolding in Gaza. We recognise the gravity of such a conclusion. Genocide is the gravest of international crimes, and Governments must act when they believe that it is happening.

As the First Minister set out, the ministerial code requires the Scottish Government to follow international law and to meet international treaty obligations. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the Labour amendment explicitly and specifically recognises the importance of international law to the question whether support for arms companies can continue. It is right to do so and, as the First Minister also set out, it is in taking account of international law and the ministerial code that we have paused new support.

It is, of course, ultimately for international courts to decide whether genocide has occurred, but Governments cannot wait until it is too late; history has taught us that harsh lesson. The last genocide in Europe took place in Srebrenica in 1995. However, it took until 2007, 12 years later, for the International Court of Justice to recognise that situation as genocide. History will judge all decision makers on what we have done to react to the facts that we can all see. Doing nothing, prevaricating or seeking to avoid difficult decisions is not an option.

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice found a prima facie case that the Israeli Government was committing genocide, and it issued provisional measures. In May 2024, following the Israel Defense Forces' assault on

Rafah, the court issued additional orders, to halt military operations that might inflict on Palestinians in Gaza conditions that could bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part.

The alarm has been raised. Evidence is on television daily. More than 63,000 people, most of whom were women and children, have died. Famine has been declared, while thousands of truckloads of aid are blocked and desperate Palestinians risk death in trying to access the meagre supplies that are being distributed under gunfire by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. United Nations leaders have expressed fears of a genocide.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Does the cabinet secretary recognise, as I do, that the evidence for the continuing outrages perpetrated by the Netanyahu Government have prompted former Likud Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to say that Netanyahu's proposals for a "humanitarian city" in Gaza are tantamount to "ethnic cleansing"?

Angus Robertson: I agree with the intervention that Alex Cole-Hamilton has described; it is one of a number of interventions that point to the facts that we can all see. They are there for us all to see—the question is whether we act. The First Minister has, today, set out not only the actions that the Scottish Government is taking, within our powers, but what we expect the UK Government to do, including joining South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice.

The United Kingdom bears a unique historical responsibility, as the former colonial power, over a territory that is so bitterly contested. The First Minister's statement sets out what the Scottish Government can do within our powers. In effect, the pause on new support for arms companies linked to genocide constitutes the Scottish Government's divesting its investment, exactly as the Scottish Greens' amendment calls for. It is clear that the vast majority of the actions that the amendment calls for, such as sanctions, are outwith our powers and are—as the amendment itself notes—matters for the UK Government.

The motion for debate refers simply to the need for the state of Palestine to be recognised, and it is for the United Kingdom Government to take that decision. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced that the UK would recognise the state of Palestine at the General Assembly of the United Nations, unless the Israeli Government declared a ceasefire, allowed humanitarian access, halted West Bank annexations and showed genuine commitment to peace and to a two-state solution.

Although the Scottish Government has welcomed that decision, having repeatedly called on the UK Government to recognise Palestine, we are clear that recognition should not be conditional but should instead be a first step towards a two-state solution in which Palestinians and Israelis live peacefully, side by side. Recognition is the right of every Palestinian in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Let us be clear. Netanyahu's Government has rejected the United Kingdom's conditions. The Israeli Security Cabinet took the chilling decision to seize Gaza City, which is home to around 900,000 civilians and is where the United Nations has declared that famine conditions exist. Israeli forces have since attacked Gaza City suburbs, killing civilians and ending humanitarian pauses. Those actions directly contradict the UK's demands.

On 20 August 2025, the Israeli Government approved the massive E1 settlement project, which would likely make a two-state solution unviable. Israeli minister Bezalel Smotrich said:

> "This reality finally buries the idea of a Palestinian state, because there is nothing to recognise and no one to recognise".

Those chilling words will resonate through the ages. We have been warned.

The UK, having authored the Balfour declaration, bears historic responsibility to uphold the principle of equitable rights—something that recognition of Palestine unconditionally would help to restore. Palestine is recognised by 147 United Nations member states, is a UN observer and is accepted by the International Criminal Court as a state entity. The UK's history imposes a moral duty. The Balfour declaration's promise of mutual rights cannot be realised without Palestinian statehood. That must be the starting position.

As well as genocide in Gaza, we see worsening settler violence in the West Bank. According to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 1,000 settler attacks have been recorded in this year alone. On Monday this week, the First Minister and I spoke to the Palestinian head of mission in London, Husam Zomlot, and he described to the First Minister and me, in heartbreaking terms, what he has witnessed recently in the West Bank. He was clear that the Israeli Government's aim is to settle the entire West Bank. He described the West Bank's economic strangulation of more than 50 per cent unemployment, of roadblocks and of Palestinian communities penned in behind walls and behind wire. That is his and nearly 3 million Palestinians' home. Can any of us imagine what it must feel like for them to be systematically removed from their homeland and to have their homes and livelihoods destroyed and their children's futures stolen while the international community fails to act decisively?

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Is the minister familiar with the case of Palestinian Awdah Hathaleen, who was shot dead in the West Bank only a few weeks ago? Does he agree that, under this Netanyahu Government, Israel has become a lawless state? A man, whom we have all seen if we have watched the footage, shot Awdah Hathaleen dead, but there will not be a trial or any kind of accountability. Can we see now that Israel is not a democracy if it does not have a court system?

Angus Robertson: The case that Pauline McNeill raises is shocking. What is perhaps more shocking is that it is not isolated. Unfortunately, two-tier justice or non-existent justice for Palestinians in the occupied territory is but a symptom of the wider challenge. I acknowledge Ms McNeill's long-standing involvement in this issue, and I thank her for raising this particular case, but I am sure that she shares my view that it is one of many and that they are all totally unacceptable.

The First Minister has announced actions that the Scottish Government will take and what we want the United Kingdom Government to do, the latter of which includes following Ireland's example of banning goods produced in illegal settlements and increasing sanctions against those who promote such settlements. This wave of settler violence appears to be systematic and escalating, and it is going unpunished by the Israeli Government and the Israel Defense Forces. It forces Palestinians off their land, erases livelihoods and communities, and intensifies the humanitarian crisis. There is no time to waste. The UK Government must act now, before it is too late.

On Monday, I joined the First Minister in meeting representatives of Scotland's Jewish community to make clear the esteem in which they are held and the value that we place on the community's contribution to our nation. They must not suffer antisemitism because of the actions of Netanyahu's Government.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for the expression of that sentiment. He will know about the extraordinary efforts that have been entered into here in Scotland, not least through the Drumlanrig accord, which was promoted by Edward Green and Imam Dr Sayed Razawi. He will also know that, in response to the meeting that he had with the First Minister and the Jewish community, there are concerns. Among them is concern that such measures will fuel prejudicial action against the Jewish community in Scotland, and not least from the parents of pupils at Calderwood Lodge, in my constituency, which is Scotland's only Jewish primary school and the world's only Jewish-Catholic campus. How will he give effect to that sentiment?

Angus Robertson: Jackson Carlaw is as committed to his Jewish constituents as I am to mine. I represent Edinburgh's synagogue, the central mosque and the churches of our main Christian denominations. Scotland's Jewish community is a much-valued part of our national life, as the First Minister has made clear. I recognise—as we all do—how difficult things are for the Jewish community, not only because Hamas is still holding hostages, but because of the fears and charged emotions that exist in light of the appalling situation that is being meted out to Palestinian people. I acknowledge the Mr Carlaw's point. We all need to be mindful of that aspect.

In drawing my contribution to a close, I highlight that the Israeli Government's approach to delivering aid via the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation has failed tragically. The Israeli authorities must immediately allow humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East—UNRWA—to complete their work unimpeded and at scale.

Since the conflict began, the Scottish Government has committed £1.3 million for Gaza and the wider middle east, including £750,000 for UNRWA and a further £550,000 for the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal, Mercy Corps and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund—£250,000 in total was announced in November 2024 and £300,000 was announced on 22 April 2025.

The First Minister announced today that the Scottish Government will provide £400,000 of funding to Kids Operating Room to establish the Gaza HOPES field readiness hub in Scotland. That will unlock $15 million of funding to deliver a rapid-deployment field hospital in Gaza that will provide essential services. The hub, which will be based in Dundee, will also be used to support field hospital deployments in future humanitarian crises. We will also donate £600,000 to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led humanitarian fund for the occupied Palestinian territories to provide life-saving health services, supplies and shelter for those who are most at risk. We have also committed to providing medical support for up to 20 injured children from Gaza. We expect the first arrivals, along with their families, in mid-September.

We face a defining moment in our lifetimes. As the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, said one month ago, we are witnessing the

"incredible, incredible destruction of an entire people".

The international community must act, Scotland must act, and the United Kingdom Government's special responsibility places on it the unenviable but necessary burden of leading that endeavour.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees with the recognition of the State of Palestine and that peace in the region must be pursued by all.

15:52

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives are open to supporting the motion that is before the Parliament today. It has been quite carefully drafted; one can add different interpretations to it. Whether that is to accept all the content from the Scottish Government is a separate matter. We will be listening with care to the way in which the debate is conducted and in relation to any amendments that might be passed.

The chamber is once again debating the middle east, a region that is too often characterised by tragedy, and today by the conflict in Gaza. We remember that we are not speaking in abstract terms but of human lives—of Israeli families who live under the terror of rocket fire and of Palestinian families who are trapped between the cruelty of Hamas and the failure of international institutions to protect them.

Every statistic that we hear represents men, women and children whose lives have been torn apart, and far too many of those statistics are the lives of men, women and children in Gaza.

Let me be absolutely clear in the context of the unfolding of this event that Israel, like any sovereign nation, had the right—indeed, the duty—to defend its citizens. Hamas is not a government and it is not a liberation movement; it is, as Anas Sarwar recognised, a terrorist organisation. Its massacre of Israeli civilians, its kidnapping of the innocent and its relentless rocket fire are not acts of resistance; they are acts of terror. No responsible state could have sat idly by in the face of such atrocities.

As I posed in my question to the First Minister, we should also reflect on the language that is used to describe the conflict. When Russia invaded Ukraine, it was rightly called Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and when Iraq was invaded, what was spoken of was Saddam Hussein's war against Kuwait, but when Israel is attacked and forced to respond, it is too often referred to as Israel's war. Rightly or wrongly, that phrase implies for many, and particularly for the Jewish community, that an entire people—the Jewish people—are responsible for the decisions of their Government. That is a dangerous double standard.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Jackson Carlaw talks about the right of the Israeli state to act. Does he agree that, given that it is an occupying force, it has responsibilities under international law to allow food, aid and other support and to allow daily life to go on in the occupied territories, which it has systematically failed to do, not just for two years but for decades?

Jackson Carlaw: I agree with the substance of Ms Chapman's point and I will return to it.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I simply want to assure Jackson Carlaw that, every time I have written about this, which I have done often, I have made it plain that Hamas's actions were atrocious and that it is Netanyahu, not the Israeli people, who is at fault in his actions. I say that to assure the member that those of us who are writing about this make that distinction very loud and clear.

Jackson Carlaw: Unfortunately, that is not necessarily generally and commonly the case. In fact, we talk about Hamas's atrocity in Israel, not Gaza's atrocity in Israel. The parallel is to be seen. It is not the Jewish people who are responsible for the decisions of their Government. There is a dangerous double standard that blurs the line between legitimate criticism of Government policy and the prejudice of antisemitism that some will exploit. We have to be vigilant about the distinction being erased. I thank the cabinet secretary for his remarks as he paid tribute to the Jewish community in this country and directly addressed their fears.

Hamas's evil does not stop there; it embeds itself among the very civilians it claims to represent. It has launched rockets from schools, hidden weapons in hospitals and stored explosives beneath homes. It has turned the people of Gaza into human shields. The suffering of civilians in Gaza is real, but the moral responsibility is not only that directed at Israel; first and foremost it is with Hamas. Some blame Israel for the shortage of aid—I have heard that said, and I think that there are legitimate arguments that need to be explored. However, the reality is more complex and more damning of the international system. Israel has opened border crossings and convoys are ready, and yet, too often, food and medicine sit idle because the United Nations refuses Israeli escorts to guarantee safe passage from looting. We know that reports suggest that as much as 88 per cent of aid was intercepted and that what does get through is often stolen by Hamas and diverted away from the children and families who need it most.

Let me be absolutely clear: this is a shortage that is caused not only by Israel's blockade but by

Hamas's brutality and the inaction of the United Nations. It is the innocent who pay the price.

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackson Carlaw: I will have to make some progress, but I will be closing for our side, and I will take as many questions as I can at that point, as I have no written remarks prepared.

Britain must speak with both clarity and compassion, yet if we are to speak seriously about peace, we must look beyond Gaza, because Hamas does not act alone. Behind Hamas, behind Hezbollah in Lebanon, behind the Houthis in Yemen, stands the same hand: Tehran. Iran has spent decades arming, funding and directing a network of proxies. It thrives on conflict and instability, exporting chaos to entrench its own dictatorship. Every rocket fired into Israel and every drone launched across borders bears the fingerprints of the Iranian regime. So, that means pressing the United Nations for action there, too. It means working with allies to stop Iran's weapons from flowing into the region, and it means refusing to let those who seek to delegitimise Israel from dominating the narrative. Compassion for the innocent does not weaken our resolve.

That is why Britain and Scotland cannot afford to be naive. This is not simply about territory or religion; it is a struggle between a democratic state with a Government with which people may have issues seeking peace and a terror network that is fuelled by an authoritarian regime that despises peace. If we are serious about stability, we must be serious about countering Iran's malign influence diplomatically and economically where necessary, alongside our allies.

In this chamber, we might differ on emphasis, but we should not differ on the principle that Israel has the right to live free from terror and that Palestinians have the right to live free from fear and in peace in a state that can be recognised. Britain has the responsibility to stand always on the side of peace, security and the rule of law. That means solidarity with our allies, compassion for civilians caught in the crossfire and confronting those powers that profit from endless war.

This conflict should remind us of a simple truth, which is that the values that we cherish—democracy, security and the sanctity of human life—are defended not by words alone but by resolve. Our resolve must be clear. We stand for Israel's right to exist. We stand for peace and a renewal of hope for all the Palestinian people. We stand against those, from Hamas to Tehran, who would see both destroyed. That is the moral duty of our nation. That is the path to a future that is worthy of the peoples of the middle east.

I move amendment S6M-18686.3, to insert after "Palestine":

"at the appropriate time and as part of a wider and lasting peace settlement in which the Palestinian people are free from the control of Hamas,".

16:00

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I rise to move the amendment in my name and make clear that the Government's unamended motion is also in our name: we support the immediate recognition of the state of Palestine.

Today, I want to speak of one people, humanity, not two; one set of values, justice, before we talk of two-state solutions; and one goal, peace, before we apportion names to crimes in Gaza and the West Bank, where there have been so many, by so many.

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"

is a verse from the book of Exodus, which is shared by Christians and Jews, in the Old Testament. It is also a verse in the Qur'an. It is not, as some might think, an encouragement to violence; it is instead an exhortation to limit it, for retaliation to be proportionate and to end the code of vengeance that called for an eye for an eyelash.

No one who calls themselves part of humanity can say that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not breached that living text, which was shared in his response to the indefensible atrocities of Hamas. Yes, Israel had the right and duty to defend itself after Hamas had murdered and kidnapped its children, but the Israeli Prime Minister does not have the right to slaughter. He has turned the clock back, rather than building a new future for his nation and region. The peace of Israel depends on the peace of Palestine.

I say in response to Jackson Carlaw that I believe that Netanyahu represents his Government—his coalition perhaps—but not the Israeli people. We must all acknowledge that, particularly in our own communities, where our protests cannot be allowed to sow division. My leader and my friend Anas Sarwar has called the Israeli Government's recent actions genocide, and I agree. Other colleagues have talked of war crimes; I do not demur.

Humza Yousaf (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP): I thank Neil Bibby for his contribution so far. I also welcome Anas Sarwar's statement that a genocide is taking place. David Lammy called it a moral outrage and Keir Starmer called it horrifying.

On that very point, assuming that Neil Bibby agrees with his colleagues, how on earth can it be justified to sell one single arm, weapon or F-35 component to the very country and regime that is

committing that moral outrage, that horrifying situation, that genocide?

Neil Bibby: I respect Mr Yousaf's passion and his campaigning on the issue. He will be aware that the UK Government has restricted arms sales, and we have called for the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise to look at what we can do in a Scottish context. That needs to be kept under constant review, and we need to take all the actions that we can to stop those crimes from happening. As Mr Yousaf is aware, the killing is still on-going and needs to stop. Although there needs to be accountability, our priority must be to call for an end to those crimes now, to stop the killings with the bullets and bombs and the killings by the barriers that are preventing food from getting into children's mouths and medicines to people's wounds.

In biblical times, famine was seen as a matter of weather or the will of God; today, the famine in Gaza is man made, on the edict of Benjamin Netanyahu. It must be lifted, which is why, across the chamber, along with people across this land, our continent and the globe, we have called for an immediate ceasefire, the release of hostages and the free flow of humanitarian aid. However, the question that we face as Scottish parliamentarians is, "What can we do?"

The Scottish Labour Party has argued for more than half a century for a two-state solution, and I recognise that other parties have long supported that, too. Statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people, and alongside a wider settlement, it is the only way for a lasting peace to be secured between Israel and Palestine.

I believe that every member in this place wants an end to the killing and a lasting peace. We might not all agree on the appropriate time to recognise the state of Palestine, but I believe that that time is now.

We might also not agree on what other actions should be taken to bring about that peace, but any action needs to be effective, involve international pressure and co-operation, and be under constant review. Important actions are already being taken by the UK Government, as set out in my amendment, in relation to restoring funding for UNRWA and respecting the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. Action is being taken by the Scottish Government, too, which is welcome.

Although we, in these islands, cannot alone end the killing in Gaza and the West Bank, we can help to make a difference by how we act and how we speak. We can further help to make a difference by clearly and immediately signalling our support for the recognition of the state of Palestine. Today, let us send out a clear message that we believe in peace and in a two-state solution. That does not mean that we need to take sides, other than to be on the side of those who wish to live against those who wish to take life—those who seek to make peace against those who seek conflict.

Let us speak of solidarity for peace, for a ceasefire and for a two-state solution, as we have always argued. Let us argue not for division for our own ends but for peace for those who suffer for no reason.

I move amendment S6M-18686.2, to insert at end:

"; welcomes the actions taken by the UK Government to respect the jurisdiction and independence of the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court, restore funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, restrict arms sales licences to prevent breaches of international law, issue sanctions on Israeli ministers and settlers in the West Bank and commit to recognising a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly; calls on the Scottish Government to update the Parliament on the due diligence checks carried out by Scottish Enterprise during investment decision processes to ensure that defence products are not used in breaches of humanitarian law in Gaza or elsewhere, and considers that there must be an immediate ceasefire, with delivery of humanitarian aid and food into Gaza, the release of all the hostages and a pathway to a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, secured by a two-state solution."

16:06

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome this opportunity for Parliament to endorse the recognition of Palestine. It is more than 50 years since the United Nations recognised the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty. Over those five decades, the failure of the international community to make that right a reality has been one of the greatest injustices in modern world history.

The urgency is clear for anybody who can bring themselves to look. For generations, Palestinians have endured a brutal occupation, and for almost two years now, they have been subjected to war crimes on a grotesque scale. The weight of legal opinion is absolutely clear: this is genocide. The recent resolution of the International Association of Genocide Scholars provides one example. It sets out that

"the actions of the Israeli Government against Palestinians have included torture, arbitrary detention, and sexual and reproductive violence; deliberate attacks on medical professionals, humanitarian aid workers and journalists; and the deliberate deprivation of food, water, medicine and electricity".

It also sets out the explicit statements of intent, which are genocidal in nature, from senior members of the Israeli Government.

It is unquestionable that, to achieve justice for Palestine, action must be taken. There is action that Scotland can take. During the recess, my colleague Ross Greer wrote to the Scottish Government to set out the actions that it can and should take now—on boycotts, divestment and sanctions. There are actions that do not rely on waiting for permission from the UK Government, such as disapplying part of the Local Government Act 1988 to allow councils to boycott companies that are complicit in the occupation, calling for public pension funds to divest from complicit companies, urging businesses to cease trading with Israel—exactly as the Scottish Government did in relation to Russia—and stopping giving public moneys to arms dealers that supply Israel. I very warmly welcome the announcement today that some of those steps will be taken; we will continue to press for others.

The UK Government should do the same and can do far more. The UK talks of the right of Israel to defend itself but says nothing about the right of Palestinians to resist occupation. Labour's amendment to the motion that we are debating recognises some positive steps, so we will not oppose it, but it takes too much credit for half measures and is a reminder of just how lacking the UK Government's response has been.

Respecting the ICC is an important principle, but there are those, including the Prime Minister, who have used it as an excuse for not describing the situation as genocide. Obviously, we support restoration of UNRWA funding, but arms export restrictions have been extremely limited. The UK has continued to provide other forms of practical and political support to the Israeli Government.

Sanctions on Israeli ministers are welcome, but the UK has not taken any steps against UK citizens who have travelled to Israel, fought for the IDF, killed a few Palestinians and returned home to face no legal consequences.

Calling for a ceasefire, aid, hostage releases and a two-state settlement is the easy bit. However, the Labour Government has not used the international voice of the UK to condemn the United States and Trump's explicit proposals for ethnic cleansing.

This issue does not stop with state recognition. There is further action that the international community must take, including co-ordinated international sanctions. The world must work together to deliver what it voted for at the UN 50 years ago: the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty in Palestine. The Palestinian state that emerges must have global support to rebuild what Israel's violence has destroyed, and it must have robust security guarantees against future incursion, invasion or occupation. Recognition of the state is long overdue, but it is only the first step towards justice for Palestine.

I move amendment S6M-18686.1, to insert at end:

", and calls on the Scottish and UK governments to immediately impose a package of boycotts, divestment and sanctions targeted at the State of Israel and at companies complicit in its military operations and its occupation of Palestine."

16:11

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to the Scottish Government for making time for this very important debate. The debate takes place against the backdrop of immense humanitarian suffering and our historical culpability, which I raised with the First Minister in response to the statement earlier.

In Gaza, what families are enduring is nothing short of a catastrophe. Thousands of civilians have been killed, millions have been displaced and basic necessities such as food, water and medicine are desperately scarce. There is a famine raging through that land. The images of starving children should be burned into the retinas of all our eyes. At the same time, Israeli families still wait in agony for the return of their loved ones who were taken hostage by Hamas terrorists in the atrocities of 7 October. We must never lose sight of either tragedy—both demand urgent action. I echo those who say that a Palestinian life is worth as much as an Israeli life.

In that spirit, it is incumbent on all of us to remember, think, speak and act on behalf of all those Israelis in whose name Netanyahu does not act, and those Palestinians whom Hamas does not represent. The motion speaks to the recognition of a Palestinian state. For the Liberal Democrats, recognition is not an abstract gesture; it is a vital, practical step towards peace and a two-state solution that ensures dignity and security for both Palestinians and Israelis.

We have heard the Prime Minister finally announce that the UK will recognise a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly later this month unless Israel agrees to a ceasefire and allows aid into Gaza, among other conditions. That marks some progress. The Liberal Democrats accept and welcome that, but the Prime Minister can go much further. The Liberal Democrats are in no doubt that the actions of the Israeli Cabinet and the IDF are in breach of international law. We have repeatedly called on the Government to go further in imposing a full arms embargo, sanctioning all members of the Cabinet—including Netanyahu—who are complicit in the illegal aid blockade and the targeting of civilians, and supporting the gathering of evidence for future accountability of these crimes against humanity.

Recognition should have happened months ago. By doing it in the way that the Prime Minister intends, we are treating recognition as some kind of bargaining chip. Of the 193 member states of the United Nations, 147 already recognise Palestine. Countries such as France and Canada are moving in that direction, too. If Britain believes in a rules-based international order—and we should do so—we should be part of that majority. We should recognise Palestine immediately and, in so doing, give renewed momentum to the cause of peace. Recognition affirms the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination—a right that they have long been denied.

Recognition would be more than just symbolic; it would allow for full diplomatic relations. A Palestinian ambassador in London and a British ambassador in Palestine would help to build the trust that is needed to advance peace. Recognition for Palestine is one of the most effective ways of disempowering Hamas, too, because it would make clear that the future of Palestine belongs not to the terrorists but to the democrats, to peace builders and to those who are committed to the two-state solution—something that Hamas has no interest in. Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people. It has no genuine interest in a Palestinian state, and it has no future in the governance of Gaza or the West Bank. Recognition is not a reward for Hamas; it is a rejection of it.

However, recognition alone is not enough; we need urgent action in order to stop the humanitarian disaster that we are seeing in Gaza. That means pressing for an immediate ceasefire, ensuring that aid flows freely and using every diplomatic lever that we have to secure the unconditional release of the remaining Israeli hostages. It also means Britain going further than the Prime Minister's limited plan. We must end arms sales to Israel and apply targeted sanctions against members of the Israeli Cabinet who are responsible for violations of international law.

At the same time, we must work with international partners to identify and support democratic leaders of Palestine and to prepare for swift elections that can unite Gaza and the West Bank under one legitimate representative Government. Only then can a Palestinian state be stable and enduring. We must invest in that peace. The international fund for middle east peace, which my party supports, is one way to bring together communities across the divide.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Mr Cole-Hamilton, you need to conclude.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The road to peace is long, and it will not be easy, but recognition of a Palestinian state is an essential step along it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Cole-Hamilton. We move to the open debate, with back-bench speeches of up to four minutes.

16:15

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): On Saturday morning, I attended a Gaza protest in Haddington, in my constituency, where around 200 people were present. Last night, I was at another event in North Berwick, which was attended by around 75 people. People from all backgrounds were present at both events. They were angry, distraught and frustrated at the on-going genocide in Gaza. Let us call it what it is: state-sponsored genocide.

An estimated 60,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli Government's actions. That figure rises every day.

I condemn the actions of Hamas on 7 October 2023. We all do.

Israel is using famine as a weapon in this war. The facts of the famine in Gaza are simple. Palestinians cannot leave, war has ended farming and Israel has banned fishing, so practically every calorie that the population eats must be brought in from outside.

Israel knows how much food is needed—it has been calibrating hunger in Gaza for decades. The co-ordinator of Government activities in the territories—COGAT—is the Israeli agency that still controls aid shipments to Gaza, and it calculated that Palestinians needed, on average, a minimum of 2,279 calories per person per day, which could be provided through 1.836kg of food. Today, humanitarian organisations are asking for an even smaller minimum ration from 62,000 metric tonnes of dry and canned food to meet basic needs for 2.1 million people each month, which represents around 1kg of food per person per day.

Gaza slid into famine this summer. Israeli officials have vigorously denied the existence of mass starvation and claimed without evidence that food is being stolen or hoarded. They have blamed hunger on UN distribution failures and shared pictures of aid pallets awaiting collection inside the border.

Data that Israel's Government has compiled and published makes clear that it has been starving Gaza. Between March and June, Israel allowed just 56,000 tonnes of food to enter Gaza. COGAT's records show that less than a quarter of Gaza's minimum needs for that period were being provided.

UN-backed food security experts recently said that

"the worst-case scenario of famine"

is now unfolding in Gaza and that food deliveries are

"at a scale far below what is needed"

amid

"drastic restrictions on the entry of supplies".

In response, Netanyahu has promised only "minimal" extra aid. The number of food trucks entering the territory has risen, but it is still well below the minimum that is needed to feed Palestinians there, much less reverse a famine.

Gaza's ministry of health says that more than 17,000 of the 60,000 Palestinians killed are children. Israel says that it seeks to minimise harm to civilians. The children of Gaza have the same rights as children anywhere—rights to water, to food, to shelter, to education, to play, to hope, to joy and, most important, to life.

We have seen the bombing of hospitals described as a mistake. We have seen the killing of journalists, which, again, has been described as a mistake. Since October 2023, many hospitals and healthcare facilities in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed by Israeli strikes and military operations.

According to a May 2025 report from the World Health Organization, 94 per cent of Gaza's 36 hospitals have been damaged or destroyed. Attacking hospitals, medical staff and the sick is considered a war crime under the 1949 Geneva conventions, which Israel has signed. Attacks on hospitals in Gaza have drawn condemnation from the UN, the WHO and other international bodies.

This is state-sponsored genocide. I welcome the commitment to recognising Palestine. The Scottish Government also needs to support a total boycott of Israeli goods and to support sanctions on the state of Israel and a complete ban on arms sales to Israel. The genocide needs to stop.

16:20

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I have said in this chamber before that, when we take away the issues that we create to divide us, such as colour, creed, religion and sexual orientation, people the world over are the same. We want the same basic things—to have a happy childhood, to spend time with friends, to get a good education, to be immersed in our community, to make a decent living, to meet somebody, to have a family and to live in peace without fear—and we all grieve loss.

However, it is those proposing to exert power, ideology and control who create division, hatred and violence. Today we are debating the humanitarian crisis in Gaza—and it is a humanitarian crisis—but in recent times, we could have been talking about atrocities in Rwanda, Mariupol, Srebrenica, Aleppo, Bosnia, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Afghanistan. In such conflicts, it is always the civilians who bear the brunt of politicians and religious leaders' misplaced ideology.

On 7 October 2023, Hamas fighters launched their assault on Israel, indiscriminately killing 1,200 Israelis in the most brutal and sickening ways. I was on a call with other MSPs, some of whom are in the chamber today, when we were unexpectedly shown footage from the body cams taken from the terrorists. I know that I was not the only one who was unprepared for the level of brutality that had been heaped upon the most innocent of people, and I cannot ever unsee it. What about the footage of those terrorists beating and abusing that young German woman—the only woman, incidentally, seen in all that coverage? She died the most horrendous death. The 251 hostages were taken by Hamas as bargaining chips and human shields against every humanitarian law we might wish to mention.

We must never lose sight of that, and under no circumstances can Hamas in any way profit from their actions or fail to be held to account—nor can the Houthis, Hezbollah or the Iranian Government, for that matter. They have all stated categorically that they wish the purging of all Israelis—the very definition of genocide.

Ivan McKee: We all share the member's reflections on the events of 7 October—the First Minister has been very clear about that in his statement—but does Brian Whittle believe that they justify genocide by the Israeli Government?

Brian Whittle: Ivan McKee pre-empted what I was about to say. The world was outraged at that atrocity, and most people supported Israel's right to defend itself. After all, the safety of a country and its people is the first duty of any government. In acknowledging Israel's right to attempt to retrieve its citizens and supporting its right to defend itself, the world asked for restraint. We asked for the Israeli Government to protect the innocent. Netanyahu has pursued a war that in no way protects the citizens of Gaza. Hamas may have committed the most brutal of atrocities, but one atrocity does not justify another. Netanyahu must be held to account.

However, as I raised with the First Minister, what I cannot get my head around is why supplies are not getting through to the people who desperately need them. There is no shortage, after all. Both sides might blame each other, but there is no doubt in my mind that Hamas is intercepting supplies where it can and is diverting them. Because of its actions, we can safely surmise that it cares little for the Palestinian people.

Maggie Chapman: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is concluding.

Brian Whittle: My question is: where is the UN in all this? It cannot be outwith its ability to ensure that supplies get to where they are needed. It has shown itself to be toothless and useless.

Netanyahu is not Israel, and Hamas is not Palestine. Both of the civilian populations have spoken out against their respective leaders. I do not excuse the actions that have been taken, nor do I condone the choices that have been made, but there can be no lasting peace until both sides are willing to face up to the consequences of their actions and accept that neither side has a monopoly on the moral high ground. Neither the Israeli Government nor Hamas can claim to be innocent victims, but their choices have created many among their citizens.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that back-bench speeches are up to four minutes.

16:25

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): This is a difficult and emotional speech for me to make in this debate. I am an emotional person, as we all know, and my first thoughts were to go down that route.

I listened to Jackson Carlaw and have considered how he put his point of view across, and although I disagreed with much of what he said, I am glad that it was Jackson Carlaw who was expressing that point of view for the Conservatives. I do not think that it would have been handled as well by any of his other colleagues.

I am aware of how difficult peace in the middle east is. It will not happen overnight. I believe that Scotland's voice has to be heard, and it is right that Scotland's Parliament should discuss this issue.

There is also the inhumanity of what Hamas did in October 2023 to take into account. However, there comes a time, regardless of our own views and regardless of our politics, when we say, "Enough is enough." The genocide in Gaza has to end. Earlier today, I mentioned the targeting of 247 journalists during the conflict. We must understand how wrong that is.

This debate is not just politics for me—the plight of the people of Palestine has been a major issue for me for a very long time. I have been demonstrating on the streets for Palestine for decades; I remember taking my children to demonstrations when they were young. Jessica and James loved the colour of the spectacle. They grew up with chants for justice in their ears, flags in their hands and an understanding that silence in the face of injustice is never an option. Now they have their own children, and yet we are still shouting, marching and demanding the very same things.

More than 63,000 people—women, men and children—are gone, wiped out by bombs and bullets, and now by hunger. Families have been slaughtered while queuing for food. Let me say that again: families have been slaughtered queuing for food. Parents in Gaza have been forced to choose between their children starving to death or being shot trying to find a loaf of bread. That is not defence—that is barbarity.

Paisley for Palestine has kept the struggle alive in our community. Its members have marched, held vigils and stood shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian people. One of the most powerful moments was the presentation of "Gaza: Doctors Under Attack" that they had. That film lays it bare: doctors, the very people who are trying to save lives, are being deliberately targeted. That is not random—it is a systematic attack on the professional classes of Palestine. If the doctors, the teachers and the lawyers are killed, that makes statehood harder. Even worse, it crushes hope itself, and that is unforgivable.

That is why recognition of Palestine is so important. It is not a gift to be handed out. That recognition must be unconditional and irreversible, and it must come with consequences for those who have continued this horror. More than 140 countries, including Ireland, Norway, Spain and Slovenia, have recognised Palestine, yet the UK still drags its feet. Keir Starmer talks about recognition and then ties it to conditions dictated by the very state that is starving children in Gaza. That is shameful and weak.

More than 63,000 lives have been lost. Women and children have been starved, bombed and buried while the world looks on. Recognition of Palestine is not charity—it is justice. There should be a ceasefire now. Stop the arms sales and recognise Palestine as a state, unconditionally and irreversibly. Nae mair excuses, nae mair delays—Palestine must be free, and Scotland stands with it.

16:29

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the motion has been lodged by the Scottish Government, and that the debate is taking place in Government time. I also welcome the earlier statement from the First Minister.

I appreciate that there are those who say that this Parliament should not be debating international issues, but I believe that it is right that we are holding this debate, as it affects all of us and our security, and we cannot stay silent as we watch the carnage and the multiple breaches of international law.

The main argument against the Scottish Government's position seems to be that now is not the time. Given the slaughter that we have all seen, now is the time—in fact, we should have recognised Palestine many years ago.

The UK Parliament voted in favour of recognition of the Palestinian state in 2014, in a non-binding vote. However, successive UK Governments have failed to recognise Palestine. As the cabinet secretary and Alex Cole-Hamilton have said, the state of Palestine has been recognised by 147 of the 193 member states of the UN, and it has been a non-member observer state since 2012. As Anas Sarwar pointed out earlier, France, Australia, Canada and the UK recently stated their intention to recognise Palestine by September 2025—this month. This debate is therefore timely, and I urge the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine without condition.

The backdrop, of course, is the extensive media coverage of human suffering, the mutilation and slaughter of children, the levelling of Gaza and destruction of infrastructure, starvation, famine and a blockade. Nobody can say that they are not aware of the human misery. Since the horrific events of 7 October 2023, there have been at least 20 UN votes expressing concerns and condemnation of Israel's actions and calling for a ceasefire and for self-determination of the Palestinian people—but Israel is not listening. Israel annexed land by force in 1948 and 1967; illegal Israeli settlements have been built on Palestinian land since 1967; and the Israeli state has a formal system of legalised discrimination against Palestinian people.

Over the past two years, there have been some of the highest known death tolls among journalists, health and humanitarian workers and UN staff. Hundreds of Palestinians have been detained and have been subject to arbitrary detention in the West Bank. Children in Gaza have borne the brunt of the war; thousands of children have been killed and many more are living with life-changing injuries. There are verified reports of children dying from starvation and disease.

Any plan for peace must include Palestinian voices. I hope that the political groupings come together—it would be disappointing if the vote today were not unanimous. The Scottish Parliament must support the Palestinians and must support recognition today.

16:33

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I whole-heartedly voice my support for the motion while, at the same time, rejecting those voices that would seek to silence Scotland's right to speak on such important issues. Such voices echo hollow with hypocrisy, on the one hand calling for the vocal condemnation of the atrocities of 7 October 2023—a condemnation that I have repeatedly made and make again today—and, on the other hand, calling for silence on the atrocities that we have witnessed since then. I agree with the sentiment that words alone are no longer enough and I believe that, almost two years on, it is time for action. The UK Government must, without delay, put its words into practice and recognise the state of Palestine.

Despite some opinions to the contrary, I believe—and I hope—that Scotland can play a meaningful role in furthering efforts to achieve a lasting and just peace between Palestinians and Israelis. This Monday, as part of the Scotland forum 2025, which promotes international co-operation and understanding, Scotland welcomed elected representatives from across the Nordic nations. We gave them the time, space and opportunity to discuss and agree on a joint position on the question of Israel and Palestine.

The resulting Nordic initiative on Israel and Palestine, adopted in Edinburgh this week, calls on all Governments to recognise the state of Palestine. I understand that that historic declaration, which is the first joint declaration by the Nordic states, will be published this week and be open for all parliamentarians to support. I will happily share it with colleagues across the Parliament. The declaration also calls for the restoration of the two-state solution to the centre of the international agenda.

Even though the two-state solution is not only central to, but essential to, a just peace for all parties—Palestinians and Israelis—it is much misunderstood in today's world. Many see it as simply entrenching division through the creation of hard borders between two nations. Nothing could be further from the truth. The proposal envisages an interim period during which negotiations on final status would take place. At that point, there would be no hard borders. Instead, there would be a joint administrative body—something more akin, in my mind, to a confederation of co-operation and shared interests. Let us be clear that the proposal and its specifics have already been comprehensively explored and documented. The idea of a two-state solution is not embryonic but is ready for implementation, down to the smallest of details.

That brings me to what I believe is a central and recurring theme in this debate—that of education.

If we are to form opinions and make informed decisions, education is key. Too often, young people—and, indeed, many of us, as well as Israelis and Palestinians—feel helpless, believing the situation to be intractable. That leads to hopelessness when, in fact, hope is justified. I understand that steps in Scotland to provide schools with materials on the wider context of the situation have been stalled. I urge the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government to take steps to remedy that impasse and to inform and offer hope to our young people.

Action must be taken now. I urge the UK Government to follow through on its promises. I believe that Scotland can play an important role by facilitating dialogue, bringing together diverse voices and providing the space for them to be heard.

16:36

Humza Yousaf (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP): "Never again." Those are the words that we repeat every year when we attend Holocaust memorial day. We rightly gather and promise to honour the memories of the 6 million Jews and all those who were killed during the evil of the Holocaust. "Never again," we say.

I am not sure whether, in the annals of human history, we have ever told ourselves a bigger lie. Try telling the parents of the 17,000 children who have been murdered in Gaza, "Never again." Look into the eyes of the tens of thousands of children who have become orphans and tell them that we really meant it when we said, "Never again." Tell the families of all the hospital workers, journalists and aid workers who have been massacred with absolute impunity, "Never again."

So awful is the genocide that we are witnessing that we are having to create a new lexicon just to describe the horrors that we are witnessing. Dr Tanya Haj-Hassan, a Canadian paediatrician who has worked in Gaza, tells us that doctors had to create a new abbreviation for the children they were treating: WCNSF—wounded child, no surviving family. What has become of us that we can allow ourselves to be so divided by the geopolitics when a massacre of tens of thousands of children is happening in front of our very eyes and the world does virtually nothing about it? Shame on us. Gaza is the cemetery upon which our collective humanity has died.

We should be in no doubt about what we are witnessing. It is a genocide. That is the opinion of the world-leading authority on genocide, the International Association of Genocide Scholars, which has declared that Israel's conduct meets the legal definition of genocide. It is not the only organisation to have done so. Amnesty International, MSF, Oxfam, Israeli human rights organisations such as B'Tselem and many more voices of authority tell us that genocide is taking place in Gaza. Predictably, one of the most vocal voices to oppose that suggestion is the very man who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It has been to my astonishment that, over the past 48 hours, some members in the chamber have expressed the view that we should not have this debate in our nation's Parliament. That was never, by the way, an argument that they made when we debated Ukraine, and I wonder why Palestinian lives matter less. They have said in their arguments in the past couple of days that foreign affairs are reserved to the Government in London. To them, I ask: is your compassion reserved? Is your humanity reserved?

We have an absolute obligation in this place to tell the stories of those who do not have the privilege of the platform that we have. In that vein, let me end by telling the chamber about my wife's cousin, Sally. She is in Gaza with her husband and four children. As I tell her story, I want members to think of their children, their nieces and nephews and their grandchildren. Sally, her husband and their four children are being starved. When Sally hugs her children, instead of feeling a warm embrace, she feels instead their spine, their ribs, protruding through their skin. They are becoming quite literally emaciated in her arms, and while they cry through the pain of not eating or drinking, she has to try to comfort them while starvation grips her body.

I say to members: imagine that that was your child. Imagine your child suffering the catastrophic effects of a man-made famine while thousands of tonnes of food were simply across the border, and you could do nothing about it.

The author Omar El Akkad wrote:

"One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This".

I urge members across the chamber not to wait until that day but to examine their consciences and ensure that, when our children ask us what we did when a genocide was occurring, we can at the very least say that we were on the right side of history.

16:41

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the Government for bringing this debate to the chamber. In a previous debate, in June, I said that we need more serious discussion of our country's role in these conflicts and how we can alter our actions to limit the likelihood of war. However, let us be honest: this has gone far beyond war. It is outright aggression on an entire population of

people, who have been bombarded with bombs in what is—let us be frank—a planned and targeted operation. Netanyahu's regime seeks to cleanse Gaza of its people, and there must be consequences. We cannot stand by. This Parliament needs to challenge that, and I am glad that the Government has brought this debate to the chamber in Government time.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion and the amendments. It is our duty to speak out and expose what is happening in the hope that, ultimately, it makes some difference to those who are suffering an unimaginable life.

I receive constituent correspondence about this issue every single day, in every form that you can imagine. Scots are disgusted by what they are seeing, and they see only a fraction of what has gone on. We can be sure of that, as journalists have been stopped from entering the besieged strip, and those who are already there have faced starvation, severe malnutrition, deliberate targeting and, ultimately, death. That is a sombre thought about brave people who merely seek to tell the truth to the rest of the world. I believe that it is my duty to be clear about those crimes and to push all Governments to take action so that those who elected me know that their voice is being heard in the Scottish Parliament.

Our constituents expect Governments to take peaceful action that creates consequences for the regime. Failure to act makes us complicit, and it is to my eternal shame that many people in positions of power have been slow to act and have taken a route of simply saying as little as possible. I am well aware of just how impotent we are, as MSPs, to stop this genocide. However, that should not mean that we fail to use every ounce of influence that we have to make it clear that these atrocities are not in our name.

I support the actions of the UK Government, as laid out in the Scottish Labour amendment. I want the UK Government to be robust in its approach, and I will continue to lobby it, as many in my party and others do, to urge it to do more.

A Palestinian state must be recognised without condition. In Scotland, we need to be assured that no public money is reaching arms parts that may reach Gaza, and the Scottish Government must continue to track that money. I welcome today's statement from the First Minister.

We must use every opportunity to strive for peace, which can be hoped to be achieved only once Palestine has the same recognition that all sovereign states should have. Palestinians have the right to statehood and a life free from fear. However, at the moment, many simply need food and clean water. What does that say about humanity?

There is no war left to fight. Gaza has been destroyed, and the West Bank has once again been turned into an open-air prison. We have all seen the images of babies and mothers who are emaciated and on the brink of death. How much longer must that go on? History has its eyes on us. The conflict must end, and we must all play our part in ensuring that that happens now.

16:46

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): War is seldom the best way of solving problems, and, undoubtedly, there have been far too many deaths in all three of the current major conflicts—in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza. However, to say that any of those three amounts to "genocide" is a step too far and does not help to resolve the present situation. Apart from anything else, genocide requires intent, and I do not see evidence of intent on Israel's part to destroy the population of Gaza.

Where we see intent to commit genocide is when people use phrases such as "from the river to the sea", which implies genocide with the removal of all Jews from Israel.

We need a longer-term plan and we need peacemakers.

Ivan McKee: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: No—I am sorry. I have only four minutes.

If we could get all parties to agree on a longer-term plan, even if only in broad outline—be that a two-state solution or something else—it might be easier to achieve short-term improvements such as the release of the hostages and a ceasefire. Essential to that is that all parties must accept each other's right to exist. That includes Iran and Hamas, or any replacement for Hamas that Iran might put in place, recognising Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state.

The UN is often known for peacekeeping—with, I fear, mixed success historically. However, what we need now are peacemakers rather than peacekeepers. We desperately need international statesmen, such as former President Jimmy Carter, who would be respected by all parties and who might seek common ground and a space for compromise. That is the role that I would like the UK or Scotland to play. We have plenty of people cheering on either side, and we do not really need any more of that. Norway has shown in the past what even a small country could do by way of moving negotiations along.

The present Israeli Government faces considerable opposition within Israel, not least from those who want the release of the hostages—there is no real progress in that regard.

I do not believe that Israel can actually defeat Hamas. Even if it did so, a new group, backed by Iran, under a new name, would likely arise. I know that the situation in Northern Ireland was different, but it showed us that, however much we detest the other side, eventually we need to hold talks and negotiate.

Sadly, I fear that Israel is steadily losing friends, the longer that the one-sided war goes on, while opposition to Israel is strengthening in Gaza, Palestine and beyond. At the cross-party group on building bridges with Israel, and elsewhere, I have asked representatives of the Israeli embassy what the Israeli Government's aim is in the conflict, but I have never had a clear answer.

We all need to ensure that we judge Israel by the same standards that we apply to other countries around the world, where there is horrendous abuse of minorities and others by a variety of states—such as Afghanistan with women; China with Tibetans, Uyghurs, Christians and Falun Gong; Myanmar with Muslims; and North Korea with any religious group. However, it seems that some people hold Israel to a different standard, potentially because it is the only Jewish state. We have to be very careful about doing that, as both Europe and the Arab world have a long history of treating Jews as second-class citizens. We need to be careful not to repeat those historical injustices.

The Scottish Government seeks immediate recognition of Palestine as a state. I fear that that has no real meaning in practice and would not really move us forward. However, I still think that a two-state solution is probably the best solution that we can aim for. Therefore, let us see increased medical and other aid getting into Gaza but, primarily, let us see both the UK and Scotland doing more to encourage, promote and help to make peace.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:50

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): This debate has not simply been a question of foreign policy; its purpose is to confront a question of humanity. In Gaza, tens of thousands of children, women and men have been murdered, whole families have been erased and hospitals, schools and places of worship have been reduced to rubble. A people have been systematically starved, displaced, blockaded, bombarded and subjected to collective punishment.

That is not an accident of war or a tragic misfortune—it is the deliberate machinery of genocide, and Scotland, whether we wish it or not, is entangled in that machinery. At least £8 million of public money has gone from Scottish Enterprise into the hands of arms manufacturers such as Leonardo, Raytheon and others: merchants of death who have supplied weapons and equipment that is used in Israel's assault on Gaza. Not a single one of them has failed the so-called human rights due diligence test—that is a damning indictment of a system that pretends to neutrality while enabling atrocity.

Let us be clear: we cannot wash our hands of this. Every £1 of public money that supports those firms is £1 of complicity in the death of a child in Gaza. Every political equivocation, and every refusal to name apartheid and genocide for what they are, is complicity. I therefore welcome the First Minister's statement earlier today, but we must go further. The Parliament must find the courage that too many Governments across the global north have lacked. We must not avert our eyes. We must not let the words catch in our throats—apartheid, genocide. Those are not rhetorical flourishes; they are legal and moral realities.

We must also recognise the decades of injustice that the Palestinians have faced. The recent famine that Paul McLennan highlighted is only the latest atrocity inflicted on a people by the Israeli state. The Palestinians have suffered illegal settlements, the silencing of their politicians and journalists and the constraint of their rights for four decades, as we have heard this afternoon.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who knew apartheid in its most despicable forms, told us plainly that those who continue to do business with Israel

"are contributing to the perpetuation of a profoundly unjust status quo."

Jimmy Carter told us, nearly 20 years ago, that apartheid exists in Palestine in its most despicable form. They were not afraid to speak the truth and nor should we be.

George Adam said earlier today that

"silence in the face of injustice is never an option."

That is absolutely true, but that truth, and the truth that Tutu and Carter spoke, demands action—not only recognition of the state of Palestine, though that is a necessary and urgent step, but real solidarity. That means not normalising a genocidal state. It means boycott, divestment and sanctions—the very tools that helped to topple apartheid South Africa and that can, once again, be the instruments of justice. Recognition without action is hollow, and words without consequences are just another betrayal.

I ask colleagues to think of one family—or what used to be a family—in Gaza. A mother is walking back through the ruins after a temporary ceasefire.

She does not search for her home—it is gone, as is her husband. She searches instead only for the bodies of her children. That is the scale of this horror—that is what our silence, our complicity, sustains.

That is why people gather in Aberdeen and Dundee, and in villages, towns and cities around the world. They gather in protest—not out of hate, but out of love: love for justice, love for peace and love for life itself. We are here for accountability, for integrity, for justice and for peace. We are here for Palestine. I call on this Parliament not only to recognise the state of Palestine, but to stand where history demands that we stand—against apartheid, against genocide and with the global movement of boycott, divestment and sanctions—because, if we fail to act, all our words and all our debates will be nothing more than whispers over graves.

16:55

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Amir walked 12km to a food distribution point, barefoot, to get food for his family. He kissed the hand of an American soldier, thanking him for a bag of lentils. The Israel Defense Forces killed him right in front of the soldier—executed him in broad daylight. He was five years old.

The dignity of the Palestinians is unmatched in the world. In the middle of acute famine, they remain dignified and hopeful. A former US special forces officer resigned from the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation because he had not in his entire career witnessed such brutality and use of indiscriminate force against an unarmed population, including the use of quadcopters and artificial intelligence-assisted killing.

Six-year-old children in Gaza are planning their own funerals. They know that they face death, and many are scared that they will not die with their parents. Israel and its Government have crossed a clear line into the darkest crimes. Death by deliberate starvation is a war crime—there is hardly a serious journalist who does not now accept that it is deliberate. Bombing hospitals and targeting doctors and medical staff has become commonplace. Dr Hussam Abu Safiyah is being held in an Israeli jail, and his lawyer said that he has been tortured and they do not know why.

Two hundred journalists have been killed trying to hold Israel to account. Israel has gone to extreme lengths to prevent the world from witnessing its genocide and it is committing multiple war crimes. The famine is the ugliest aspect, because it leaves permanent damage to the health of the population, and we have perhaps reached the point of no return. Back-to-back strikes on Nasser hospital caused outrage because journalists were murdered when they found a spot on the rooftop of the hospital that had a good internet connection. Evidence shows that missiles were directed at that spot. A double-tap hit, as it is known by those in the military, means that you fool the victim into thinking that they survived the hit only to carry out a bigger hit thereafter.

Israel is not held to a higher standard. Israel is held to the standards of international law, and all of those things are breaches of international law. It is not a war. It is clear that it is a deliberate plan to obliterate the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip or force them to flee. The Israeli Cabinet does not equate Palestinian lives to Jewish lives and it openly states its genocidal intentions. If you have been reading closely, you will know that even the chief of the IDF is saying to Netanyahu, “We cannot do this.” There are voices in the army trying to argue with Netanyahu, and there are many Israeli voices on their streets saying “This does not represent the Israel that we fought for.” That is the most important thing about the question of Israel’s future.

Humza Yousaf is quite right to talk about the impunity that Israel has been allowed since the occupation started in 1967. No one has been willing to hold Israel to account for its occupation. It has been acting in contravention of international law by occupying the West Bank and putting the Gaza Strip under siege for 18 years. If you have been paying attention to what is happening in the West Bank, you will know that Israel’s Administration has made it a lawless state. I mentioned earlier to the minister that Awdah Hathaleen was known by many people who go to Hebron because he was the person who shows people around and shows what Hebron is really like under occupation. He was shot dead in his own land, and there will be no accountability for that.

Like Katy Clark, Neil Bibby, Carol Mochan and others, I believe that we owe the Palestinian people nothing less than the immediate recognition of their sovereign state, without any conditions whatsoever. We must give the Palestinians the dignity that they deserve by having their country be a full member of the United Nations, and I dearly hope that there can be unanimity on that tonight. The Scottish Parliament speaking with one voice on recognition is a very powerful thing. Like many other speakers, I passionately believe that peace can come about for Israel and Palestinians only when we settle that question. The whole region depends on settling that question, and I hope that we can ensure that the occupation comes to an end.

There must be consequences for the state of Israel. It has already faced some, such as the

suspension of trade negotiations and the banning of goods that have been imported from illegal settlements, which has been a policy for quite a long time. I broadly support the Scottish Government's statement—it was really good. Nothing can be off the table to prevent the genocide and bring about compliance with international law.

In a good speech, Patrick Harvie said that

"the world must work together",

and I do not think that there has ever been a truer statement. If we are to make up for the ways that the Palestinian people have been failed, which the world has made happen, we must ensure that whatever action we take is targeted so that we can do something about the genocide and bring an end to the occupation. I believe that the UK Government should go further on that.

The brave people in Israel who are marching and challenging their own Government also need to be recognised in the debate.

Please let the Parliament speak with one voice tonight. Let the Parliament show that Scotland—all of its parties—believes in justice for the Palestinians. Peace can only come about if we add our voice to those of the other 147 countries, because isolating some of the big powers will be a very powerful thing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jackson Carlaw to close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

17:02

Jackson Carlaw: I will begin by speaking about the powerful speech from Humza Yousaf. In all the years that we have served together in this Parliament, we have always engaged together with mutual respect and—I hope—in a way that is constructive, irrespective of whether we agree or disagree.

Humza Yousaf was right when he said, "Never again." In Holocaust memorial day speeches that I have made in the chamber, I have said that it is a conceit to say, "Never again." Genocides have happened in Cambodia, Rwanda, Srebrenica and Bosnia; they have been a permanent way of the world since the Holocaust. There has been a failure by the international community to recognise that and put in place the structures that would effectively intervene and deal with these matters much earlier.

I also say to Humza Yousaf that, in expressing my view in my speech, I did not deny that there should be an opportunity for the chamber to participate in the debate. I recognise the strong feelings that have been expressed. Although, clearly, there have been speeches with which I cannot agree this afternoon, the debate has not been held in the terms that I feared it could have been, and I thank members for that.

Alex Cole-Hamilton talked about the historical perspective. In 2018, we celebrated—or commemorated, rather—the centenary of the Balfour declaration and the failure of the whole international community to act. It has taken more than 100 years to grapple with and resolve the issue of the middle east and Palestine. It was implicit in the Balfour declaration that there would be not only a state of Israel but a state of Palestine, too. That has been a failure, and it has not been arrived at without effort; lots of people have made efforts, but there has sometimes been an intransigence.

The nearest that we got was under President Bill Clinton, when he produced the Oslo accords. Yasser Arafat was on the verge of potentially agreeing what would have been a settlement on which a future peace could have been built, but, unfortunately, he was unable to sustain the agreements that he had potentially arrived at when he arrived back in the middle east. Those efforts fell apart and, really, for 30 years we have made no progress whatsoever.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the member recognise that the polarisation that was driven by the current Prime Minister of Israel was a key element in the collapse of the Oslo accords?

Jackson Carlaw: I have just recognised that there was an intransigence on all sides that stopped them from finally implementing an agreement that would have taken matters forward. It was not an intransigence from one side; ultimately, the accords collapsed because the negotiations between the lead parties could not be supported by the communities that they represented.

Mr Cole-Hamilton also said that there should not be a reward. One of the chilling things that I heard over the summer was a representative of the Palestinian people saying that

"one of the fruits of October 7"

was the decision of Governments to unconditionally recognise the state of Palestine. That is chilling, because it implies that the actions of 7 October were justified and have brought about a successful outcome. I think that we should all be concerned by that, irrespective of the view that we might come to in the debate.

Patrick Harvie *rose—*

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackson Carlaw: I need to make some progress.

I thank Neil Bibby for drawing the distinction that I asked for by not equating or conflating the current Administration in Israel with the entire people of Israel or, indeed, the entire Jewish community. I have the letter that I know the First Minister has received in response to the meeting that he and Mr Robertson had on Monday. In it, there is an underlying concern that I think it will be important for us to address, which is that, by accepting the situation, we have not suddenly found fault with the Jewish community and there is not a need for additional security for the community. It is important to understand why. When I attend Yom HaShoah commemorations each year in my constituency, the names of those who were massacred in the Holocaust, belonging to almost every family in the community in Eastwood, are on the screen. Those families live in fear of that reality as they see the prosecution of events in the middle east. Our duty is to ensure that that community—and all our communities in Scotland—remain safe and free and are treated fairly and with respect.

The First Minister (John Swinney): I take the opportunity to reinforce the point that I made to the representatives of the Jewish community on Monday, which is that they are valued members of our society and are a valued community. Their safety and security is as important to me as the safety and security of any other citizen in Scotland. We will work with them to support their security and safety.

Jackson Carlaw: The First Minister knows how much I appreciate his comments.

I take issue with one thing that Pauline McNeill has said, although I possibly understand her motivation. She said that Israel is no longer a democracy. A key right in a democracy is the right to protest. There have been widespread protests in Israel involving hundreds of thousands of people who are challenging the actions of the current Government. I doubt that anyone who is protesting in Gaza against Hamas is treated with the same leniency or tolerance, should they choose to protest.

Pauline McNeill: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackson Carlaw: I will, in a second.

Among those protesting are the hostages' families. They have the obvious concern that the prosecution of events in Gaza by the Netanyahu Administration is not designed to return their loved ones alive. It is clear that that is no longer a priority of Netanyahu, which is shameful. It began as a conquest to get back the hostages who were taken, which should be the fundamental aim of any Israeli Government action.

Pauline McNeill: The point that I was making was that, if a Palestinian is shot and there is no accountability, surely the member would accept that that is not compliant with what a normal country would do in holding criminality to account. That is my concern. Does he understand where I was coming from?

Jackson Carlaw: I appreciate that point, but I expect that the Netanyahu Government will have to face not just the judgment of the international community but that of the people in Israel, too, many of whom are deeply concerned by the actions of that Government but, nonetheless, believe in their implicit right to exist as a state.

Presiding Officer, I realise that I am out of time. I have listened carefully to the debate and to the speeches that have been made. Unfortunately, I believe that, in supporting a motion without timing, our side would be seen to be supporting the immediate recognition of Palestine, when we believe that that should be in the context of a wider settlement. We will not vote against the motion, but we will abstain.

17:09

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): This has been a powerful and sobering debate. The contributions from across the chamber reflect the depth of concern that is felt in Scotland about the unfolding catastrophe in Gaza, and they reflect our shared conviction that words must be matched by action.

In January 2024, the ICJ found a prima facie case that the Israeli Government was committing genocide, and it issued provisional measures. As the First Minister and cabinet secretary stated, we have taken account of international law and the UK's international treaty obligations, which we are required to do, not least by the ministerial code. Ultimately, it is for international courts to decide whether genocide has occurred, but—this is very important—Governments cannot wait until it is too late. History has taught us that hard lesson. We need to use every lever that is available to us: economic, humanitarian and political.

Scotland is not waiting for others to lead. Alongside calling for the UK Government to act, we are taking steps to ensure that our actions match our values. We will pause new awards of public money to arms companies whose products or services are provided to countries where there is plausible evidence that a genocide is being committed by that country—that will include Israel. Defence companies that seek support from the Scottish Government will have to demonstrate that their products are not involved militarily with Israel.

We are instructing relevant delivery bodies not to provide support to the facilitating of trade between Scotland and Israel, where possible, and we are calling on the UK Government to go further. The suspension of new trade negotiations with Israel was a start, but it is time to withdraw from the existing UK-Israel trade and partnership agreement altogether, given the human rights situation in Gaza. We call for an end to all arms exports, which are being used against Palestinians in serious violation of international humanitarian law, to Israel. We are also urging the UK to follow Ireland's lead and prohibit the import of goods that are produced in illegal Israeli settlements. Those steps symbolise our commitment on the matter. However, they are not only symbolic gestures; they are targeted, practical measures that are designed to prevent Scotland's public resources from being complicit in the suffering of civilians.

Regarding our humanitarian response, Scotland has a proud record of global solidarity. In Gaza, that solidarity is being put into action. To date, we have committed £1.3 million in humanitarian aid, which has supported UNRWA, the Disasters Emergency Committee, SCIAF and Mercy Corps. Today, we go further, as we commit another £1 million in support: £400,000 to establish the Gaza HOPES field readiness hub in Dundee, which will unlock $15 million for a deployable field hospital; and £600,000 to the UNOCHA-led humanitarian fund for the occupied Palestinian territories. We are also preparing to welcome up to 20 injured children from Gaza for treatment in Scottish hospitals. The children have endured unimaginable trauma, and Scotland will offer them care, dignity and hope. That is what it means to be a good global citizen—not just to speak but to act.

Turning to our pressure on the UK Government, Scotland is using its voice to demand accountability. We are calling on the UK Government to unconditionally and irreversibly recognise the state of Palestine as a first step towards a two-state solution. Recognition is not a gift; it is a right, and it is long overdue. The Conservative amendment says that recognition should happen "at the appropriate time", but this Scottish Government believes that now is an appropriate time—indeed, we are far beyond the appropriate time. For that reason, we are not supporting the Conservative amendment.

We urge the UK to join South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice and to commit to implementing any arrest warrants that are issued by the International Criminal Court. We also call for sanctions on Israeli ministers who are complicit in illegal settlements and military actions that target civilians. Scotland will not be complicit, and we will not be silent.

This debate is a test of our values. A defining tragedy of this century is occurring before our eyes. We are witnessing a humanitarian disaster of historic proportions. Over 63,000 Gazans have been killed. Famine has been declared. Hospitals have been bombed. Journalists have been targeted. Children are dying from malnutrition and contaminated water.

I will reflect on some of the comments made by colleagues during the debate. As always, the contributions from Pauline McNeill and Humza Yousaf were significant, and they talked about the real impact that the tragedy is having on individuals in Gaza and, as Pauline McNeill identified, in the West Bank. To anyone who says that, if Hamas were not there, this would not be happening, I say that we just need to look at what is happening in the West Bank, where Hamas is not present.

I note the near unanimity of support for the actions that have been proposed by the Scottish Government. I do not think that a single member has spoken against those measures. That is hugely welcome, and it talks of the considerable work that has been undertaken to get us to this place, with a well-crafted package of measures. It is testament to the leadership of the First Minister, who has been hugely involved in that work over the past days and weeks.

I listened with incredulity to Brian Whittle's contribution. That aid is not being provided is exclusively the fault of the Israeli Government and the Israeli military. That is not just a matter of fact on the ground; it is also the case that, under international law, it is the responsibility of the occupying power to ensure the supply of essentials to the civilian population. We should be in no doubt about that. That is particularly profound, given that we have seen the deliberate targeting and execution of aid workers on the ground by the Israeli military.

I also want to comment on Jackson Carlaw's contribution. To be honest, I found his summing up to be helpful, but I will comment on some of what he said in his opening speech. Humza Yousaf made the point that one of the defining characteristics of genocide is that there is never a shortage of those who deny that it is happening or who look the other way at the time. To be honest, I found Jackson Carlaw's opening speech to consist of deflection, denial and obfuscation, and it was a masterclass in whataboutery.

There is no justification for genocide. The responsibility lies with the Israeli Government in law and in practice. History will judge us, as it does in all genocides, on how we respond today to those events. "Never again" means never again for anyone, and that needs to be recognised.

I was not going to comment on John Mason's contribution, but I will make two points of fact. The phrase "from the river to the sea" originally appeared in the 1977 manifesto of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party. That is where that comes from. Jimmy Carter, whom John Mason talked glowingly about, was very clear that what was happening in Israel, even back then, was apartheid.

We were all horrified by the attacks on Israel by Hamas in October 2023. They caused the worst loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. We must not underestimate the trauma that that caused to the people of Israel and to Jews globally. Hamas must release all hostages immediately and fully engage in peace. However, the actions of the Israeli military at the behest of the Netanyahu Government in Gaza have gone far beyond a legitimate response.

We will not be a bystander in this crisis. To those in this crisis who are suffering, I say that we stand with you. We stand for a future where Palestinians and Israelis can live side by side in peace and security. Scotland's actions are not just about policy; they are about principle. We are guided by our values, compassion, justice and the belief in the equal worth of every human life.

In the face of mass suffering, neutrality is not an option. We must act, and we are acting, because—I say it again—history will remember those who chose to speak and those who remained silent. Let it be said today that Scotland spoke.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you. That concludes the debate on Palestine.

Business Motions

17:18

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-18695, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out changes to business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 4 September 2025—

after

followed by	Public Audit Committee Debate: The 2022/23 and 2023/24 Audits of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland

insert

followed by	Motion on Legislative Consent: Employment Rights Bill - UK Legislation—[*Jamie Hepburn*].

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-18696, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 9 September 2025

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by	Ministerial Statement: Actions to Support Improved Relationships and Behaviour in Schools
followed by	Scottish Government Debate: Twenty Years of Scotland's Railway Providing a Strong Platform for the Future
followed by	Committee Announcements
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Wednesday 10 September 2025

2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; Health and Social Care
followed by	Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.10 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Thursday 11 September 2025

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
followed by	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice and Housing
followed by	Ministerial Statement: GFG Business Operations in Scotland
followed by	Scottish Government Debate: Supporting Scottish Exports in Response to Global Uncertainty
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

Tuesday 16 September 2025

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by	Stage 3 Proceedings: Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill
followed by	Committee Announcements
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
10.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Wednesday 17 September 2025

2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business; Justice and Home Affairs
followed by	Stage 3 Debate: Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill
followed by	Stage 1 Debate: Leases (Automatic Continuation etc.) (Scotland) Bill
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Thursday 18 September 2025

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
followed by	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills
followed by	SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee Debate: SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 8 September 2025, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-18697 and S6M-18698, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on timetabling of bills at stage 1.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 16 January 2026.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment to UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 28 November 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-18699 and S6M-18700, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motion S6M-18701, on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliament (Constituencies and Regions) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliament (Disqualification) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the second supplementary legislative consent memorandum on the Employment Rights Bill.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-18686.3, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, which seeks to amend motion S6M-18686, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Palestine, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:20

Meeting suspended.

17:23

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-18686.3, in the name of Jackson Carlaw. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Gilruth. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Duncan-Glancy. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (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)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (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)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (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)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
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) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (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) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
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)
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (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)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie]

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-18686.3, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, is: For 26, Against 83, Abstentions 5.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-18686.2, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-18686, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Palestine, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The 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)
Choudhury, Foysol (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)
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)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
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, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (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) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
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)
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (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)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (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) [Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie]
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (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)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (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)

Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-18686.2, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 83, Against 25, Abstentions 6.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-18686.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-18686, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Palestine, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The 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)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
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)

Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
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)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (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)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie]

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-18686.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, is: For 62, Against 31, Abstentions 21.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-18686, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Palestine, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The 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)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
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)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
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)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (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)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie]

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-18686, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Palestine, as amended, is: For 65, Against 24, Abstentions 26.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees with the recognition of the State of Palestine and that peace in the region must be pursued by all; welcomes the actions taken by the UK Government to respect the jurisdiction and independence of the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court, restore funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, restrict arms sales licences to prevent breaches of international law, issue sanctions on Israeli ministers and settlers in the West Bank and commit to recognising a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly; calls on the Scottish Government to update the Parliament on the due diligence checks carried out by Scottish Enterprise during investment decision processes to ensure that defence products are not used in breaches of humanitarian law in Gaza or elsewhere; considers that there must be an immediate ceasefire, with delivery of humanitarian aid and food into Gaza, the release of all the hostages and a pathway to a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, secured by a two-state solution, and calls on the Scottish and UK governments to immediately impose a package of boycotts, divestment and sanctions targeted at the State of Israel and at companies complicit in its military operations and its occupation of Palestine.

The Presiding Officer: If no member objects, I propose to ask a single question on three Parliamentary Bureau motions.

As no member has objected, the final question is, that motions S6M-18699 and S6M-18700, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and

motion S6M-18701, on designation of a lead committee, all in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliament (Constituencies and Regions) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Parliament (Disqualification) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the second supplementary legislative consent memorandum on the Employment Rights Bill.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Chronic Kidney Disease

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-18369, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on recognising the impact of chronic kidney disease. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I encourage members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I invite Kenneth Gibson to open the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the impact of chronic kidney disease (CKD) on individuals and the NHS, with, it understands, thousands of people reliant on dialysis or living with a kidney transplant, and many more at risk of progression; understands that CKD is one of the most common and resource-intensive long-term conditions but considers that it lacks a specific policy focus; welcomes the Scottish Government's work on a long-term conditions strategy and notes the belief that the Scottish Government should include CKD as a dedicated strand, with actions on prevention, early diagnosis, equitable access to transplantation, and a home-first approach to dialysis care; notes the view that increasing support for home dialysis and improving organ donation rates would improve outcomes and reduce system pressures, and further notes the belief that the Scottish Government should work with people across Scotland, including in the Cunninghame North constituency, who are living with kidney disease, as well as clinicians, third sector organisations and industry, to deliver meaningful change.

17:33

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I thank each member who signed my motion, and I thank Kidney Care UK, the National Kidney Federation and Kidney Research UK for their briefings to members for the debate. I warmly welcome their representatives to the public gallery, along with representatives of the Scottish Kidney Federation.

Our kidneys are our bodies' silent workhorses. They filter our blood to remove waste, excess fluids and toxins while regulating blood pressure, balancing electrolytes, producing hormones for red blood cell formation and activating vitamin D to strengthen our bones. However, our kidneys seldom receive the recognition that other organs do. That is despite the fact that chronic kidney disease is set to become the fifth biggest cause of premature deaths globally by 2040.

Modelling by Kidney Research UK suggests that, in Scotland, more than 600,000 people—11 per cent of our population—may be living with some degree of kidney disease, much of it undiagnosed. According to data from the Scottish renal registry, 5,732 people in Scotland were receiving kidney replacement therapy as at the end of 2023. Of those, 3,491 had functioning kidney transplants and 2,241 were receiving

dialysis. Behind each of those numbers is a story about human suffering.

One CKD patient said:

"Kidney disease is insidious. It creeps into every aspect of your life. Not only that it slowly robs you of your life."

Another said:

"The condition plays a huge part in your daily living. Need to work, can't work, depression, worry, anxiety, relationship issues. Life in general can be hard."

Employment rates for people on dialysis are just 26 per cent. Between 2022 and 2032, people with CKD are projected to lose 81.6 million work days across the United Kingdom, with 11.9 million work days missed by their carers. The number of people who are on dialysis in Scotland is likely to increase significantly over the next decade, while current pre-emptive transplant and peritoneal UK dialysis rates remain below pre-pandemic levels. The direct cost of kidney disease to NHS Scotland last year was £566 million—the sum is expected to reach £1 billion by 2033 without Government intervention.

Improving kidney care is, therefore, not just clinically necessary but financially prudent. A focus on prevention, earlier diagnosis and greater use of home dialysis and transplantation can reduce the reliance on hospital-based care, with all its associated costs. Home haemodialysis is clinically and consistently safe and effective at lower cost than in-centre dialysis, while offering patients and their families greater independence and quality of life.

However, in Scotland, only 12.2 per cent of dialysis patients receive home dialysis. That is the lowest percentage across the four nations, and significantly lower than the UK average of 16.9 per cent. While NHS Grampian recently expanded access to home haemodialysis across Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen and Moray, uptake elsewhere in Scotland remains low. In Glasgow, home therapy uptake is only 7.2 per cent.

A more consistent and ambitious approach is needed to expand equitable access to home dialysis. That is especially important in rural and island Scotland, where transport remains a critical issue for patients who are required to travel for in-centre dialysis three times a week to receive life-saving treatment. Unlike in other parts of the UK, there is no national framework in Scotland to ensure a consistent service for transporting people to dialysis centres. That must change.

Six Scottish health boards told Kidney Care UK that access to all the modes of in-centre dialysis transport that they provide is needs-assessed, while six others told the organisation that their transport is open to everyone travelling to and from in-centre dialysis. Worryingly, almost two thirds of kidney healthcare professionals who were surveyed had concerns about the transport arrangements that their facility had in place for patients travelling to and from in-centre dialysis. I know that patients, their families and those who work with them would greatly appreciate a commitment from the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health to provide guidance and support to health boards to enable them to assist patients with vital transport needs.

We must also recognise the psychosocial toll on people with kidney disease and their families. Sadly, too many people with CKD feel that they are left to get on with it alone. Kidney Care UK's recent survey of adults living with kidney disease revealed that 73 per cent of patients who need psychosocial support from their NHS kidney team do not receive it, and 69 per cent said that such needs had never been formally assessed. There is a real and pressing urgency to ensure that specialist support is available to all who require it, regardless of where they live.

Improving access to kidney transplantation is also critical. Transplantation offers the best outcome for many patients, yet the transplant waiting list is at its highest level ever and transplant rates remain below pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, 265 patients received a kidney transplant, but more than 480 adults remained on the waiting list as of March 2024. That is deeply concerning. Every missed opportunity for a transplant is a chance lost for someone to live a fuller, healthier life. The transplant pathway needs to be strengthened, including with better support for living donation.

CKD is one of the most prevalent and serious long-term conditions in Scotland, yet it arguably remains largely absent from national health planning. The Scottish Government's own consultation paper on its forthcoming long-term conditions framework acknowledged that kidney disease is one of the few major conditions with no national strategy. The kidney charities that are represented in the public gallery today, and others, are calling for the introduction of a national CKD framework. Such a framework would cover prevention and early detection; patient involvement in care; support for children and young people; effective management of chronic and acute kidney conditions; and better end-of-life care.

The organisations also want CKD prevention and treatment to be a clinical priority, with annual testing for those who are most at risk, access to appropriate medications and lifestyle support to delay progression. I trust that the minister will address those asks in responding to the debate.

Before I conclude, I highlight the bloody amazing kidneys campaign by Kidney Care UK.

Since the campaign's launch in October 2024, around 200,000 people have completed the online kidney health checker, with around half identified as being at increased risk of CKD.

The campaign has reached national health service networks, public health clinics and even the European Renal Society congress. It is a helpful, albeit scary, reminder that you can lose up to 90 per cent of your kidney function without realising it. Symptoms are often vague, or are mistaken for other conditions. I encourage everyone to find out whether they are at a lower risk or an increased risk of developing kidney disease.

I pointed out earlier that other areas of health concern steal the spotlight, so to speak, while kidney health struggles in the shadows to receive the attention that patients deserve. That is changing. In May, the World Health Organization passed its first-ever resolution on kidney health, recognising it as a global priority. The time for the Scottish Government to place a national and strategic focus on kidney health, and to ensure that every person with CKD has access to the care, support and treatment that they need, is now.

I am pleased that colleagues will talk of the life experiences of constituents with CKD, and I look forward to hearing those stories.

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

17:41

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank my colleague Kenny Gibson for bringing the debate to the chamber. I also thank the organisations with which I have engaged fairly regularly—I met Kidney Care UK today, in fact, and I have met Kidney Research UK. NHS Ayrshire and Arran has been very helpful, as have the British Heart Foundation and Obesity Action Scotland.

The statistics for chronic kidney disease are stark. More than 600,000 people in Scotland are living with CKD, which is more than 10 per cent of the population. Much of that—as Kenny Gibson stated—is underdiagnosed. It will not surprise members to hear that poverty and health inequalities disproportionately affect people with CKD; we hear the same across many conditions. I heard today from Kidney Care UK's advocacy and support teams about those who come to the organisation for advice and grants. In 2023, 45 per cent of those people were sitting at stages 3 to 5, with kidney function of less than 60 per cent.

We can talk about prevention, as I often do in the chamber. CKD currently costs Scotland's economy more than £0.5 billion per year, and Kidney Research UK suggests that, without significant Government intervention, that could rise to more than £1 billion by 2033. The total annual economic impact of kidney disease in the UK is £7 billion, costing the NHS £6.4 billion, which is about 3.2 per cent of the overall NHS budget.

Employment rates among people on dialysis are low, sitting at 26 per cent. It is projected that between 2022 and 2032, CKD in the UK will result in something like 8.1 million missed work days in people diagnosed with CKD, and 11.9 million work days missed by carers of people with CKD. Both the prevalence of CKD and its cost to the NHS are expected to increase significantly in the next decade.

There are a lot of comorbidities associated with CKD. One issue that I discussed with the organisations earlier today was the impact that a diagnosis of CKD will have on someone's mental health. One in three people with CKD experience depression, which worsens health outcomes and adds to the pressures on the mental health system. Kidney Care UK, through its free counselling service, hears daily from people who are undergoing those challenges, but there is very limited support available to patients on the NHS.

Obesity is linked to a higher risk of CKD. As we well know, obesity levels in Scotland are at a record high and are rising, and that needs to be tackled. As every member in the chamber will know, having heard me speak about this before, we should be looking at how we prevent conditions such as obesity in the first place, rather than having to treat them once they occur. Prevention, detection and lifestyle advice are all really important. CKD is also a major risk factor in developing cardiovascular disease, and it can be made worse by CVD.

We recognise the importance of the integrated approach to comorbid chronic disease. However, there is significant concern that a single long-term condition framework risks oversimplifying the complexities of long-term conditions, which often have significantly different clinical pathways, with different specialisms and different impacts on patients' lives. As Kenny Gibson alluded to, kidney disease in particular remains largely absent from national planning in Scotland, despite being identified in the long-term conditions framework consultation as a major gap.

In conclusion—having got about halfway through what I wanted to say—I thank Kenny Gibson again, and I thank Kidney Care UK for its briefing. We need to consider how we prevent the disease in the first instance, because the cost to the national health service and the cost to the individual is high.

17:45

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank the many organisations concerned for their briefings, and I thank my colleague for securing the debate and raising the profile of kidney disease.

Members' business debates allow parliamentarians to bring to public awareness issues that go unnoticed, and kidney disease is one of those. They also educate politicians like me. The disease does not grab the headlines, yet it is my understanding that more people die in Scotland from kidney or kidney-related disease than from cancer. It is a long-term condition that does not usually have visible symptoms until the advanced stage, and it is incurable.

Chronic kidney disease should be a significant public health concern in Scotland. I understand that it affects 600,000 people, according to data contained in a recent petition to the Scottish Parliament. There is a slow-growing understanding of the issue, and there have been calls to improve early diagnosis and treatment. Key challenges include improving access to care, supporting vulnerable patients and preventing progression to end-stage kidney disease.

Without wishing to frighten anyone, I note that people are more at risk if they have high blood pressure, diabetes or a history of the disease in their family. Although there is currently no cure, unfortunately, treatment can slow or halt the disease's progression. Apart from the physical symptoms, there is a possible need for treatment such as dialysis or a transplant. Here I give notice, in passing, that I am sponsoring an organ donation exhibition in the Parliament later this month because, despite there being an opt-out system, organ transplants are on the decline.

"Chronic Kidney Disease: An Action Plan for Scotland" estimates that

"More than one in ten people in Scotland are estimated to have CKD. Of those, 45% ... are already in the more severe, later stages".

Is it not therefore time to make tackling the disease a priority? On that data alone, CKD requires to be much higher up the health agenda.

Statistics are one thing but, to bring home the impact of the disease, I shall recount Craig's story. Craig was diagnosed with immunoglobulin A nephropathy, or IgA nephropathy, a form of chronic kidney disease, in his 20s. He is now 54. He managed his condition without intervention until the summer of 2018, when he started to feel very unwell. Tests revealed that his kidney function had dropped to a critical level, and he was immediately put on to the transplant list. Fortunately, his mother, two sisters, brother and partner all put themselves forward to be a potential donor and, after initial tests, his eldest sister was found to be a perfect match. He was lucky.

In the interim, Craig had to go on dialysis. He opted for peritoneal dialysis, which he could do from home, and which would mean less disruption in his daily life. He had to have surgery to get a tube inserted into his abdomen, which he could then hook up to a peritoneal dialysis machine at the side of his bed at home. From then, for a period of eight months, he hooked himself up every night, and the machine used his peritoneal cavity to cleanse and filter his blood inside his body, performing the function that his kidneys no longer could. The family grew used to the whirring, gurgling and beeping noises that the machine made throughout the night, and they affectionately nicknamed it "George" after an inspirational transplant patient they had met. In a grim situation, a bit of humour helps.

There is not yet a cure, but I hope to sound a positive note. Craig had his kidney transplant from his sister six and a half years ago, and he is still going strong. He will be on immunosuppressants and a cocktail of other drugs for the rest of his life, but that allows him to lead a relatively normal life. He is forever grateful to his sister and to the doctors, the nurses and the surgeon who took care of him throughout the process.

I hope that the debate progresses diagnosis and early treatment. I repeat my thanks to Kenny Gibson, to Craig, for letting me tell his story, and to those attending. I look forward to hearing the Government's response.

17:50

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Kenny Gibson on securing this important debate and thank him for the substance of his contribution.

We almost certainly all know somebody with kidney disease, because it affects one in 10 Scots. However, we might not be able to identify those people, because many of them are undiagnosed. According to Kidney Research UK estimates, for every two people who are diagnosed with chronic kidney disease, there is a third who is struggling on, not knowing and not diagnosed. For many people who do get a diagnosis, it often comes too late to prevent kidney failure.

Behind those figures are countless tragedies and lives cut short, not to mention the misery that is experienced by hundreds of thousands of Scots every day—fatigue, swollen joints, nausea, breathlessness—and the many people not knowing or guessing the cause of their symptoms.

Kidney charities are clear that the key to tackling kidney disease is not in the accident and

emergency department, when it might already be too late, but in the community. It is about prevention and early intervention rather than crisis management. We need annual testing for those who are at risk, such as those with diabetes or high blood pressure. We need conversations about lifestyle changes that can prevent and delay the disease, medication that will help to ease the symptoms, and technology that allows patients to receive dialysis at home rather than having to trek to distant hospitals. As Kenny Gibson rightly said, only 12.2 per cent of current dialysis patients in Scotland are on home therapies—the lowest percentage across the UK.

I have heard from patients in rural areas. One woman from the Western Isles is forced to travel hundreds of miles for dialysis when it could be delivered at home. These life-changing interventions can be delivered by general practitioners, who combine the detective work of diagnosis with a deep understanding of the local community. However, the Scottish Government has woefully underfunded primary care.

According to the BMA in Scotland, GPs' share of the NHS budget has fallen from 11 per cent to 6.2 per cent since 2008. In real terms, because of inflation, that feels like a cut of 22.8 per cent. Targets for the number of new GPs that are set by the Government are increasing, and that is welcome, but we know from Audit Scotland that those targets will not be met.

Kidney Care UK is calling for a national chronic kidney disease framework that will set standards for good-quality care. I urge the Scottish Government to embrace that and agree to it, but it starts with ensuring that someone who is experiencing symptoms such as weight loss or muscle cramps can actually get an appointment with a GP and that, in turn, GPs are properly resourced to take the lead on the patient's care. If we are to make a difference, the Scottish Government must listen to kidney disease patients and campaigners and invest in primary care. That will not only improve the lives of countless Scots with kidney disease but save our NHS millions of pounds in costly hospital interventions. If we tackle chronic kidney disease, everyone benefits.

I urge the Scottish Government to accept the terms of Kenny Gibson's motion. Let us have a national strategy, let us make a difference and let us focus on tackling kidney disease.

17:54

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Kenneth Gibson for lodging the motion, which gives us all an opportunity to highlight the profound impact of chronic kidney disease on individuals, families and our national health service. I, too, welcome the visitors in the gallery, as I do the briefings that we have received.

In many ways, chronic kidney disease is a silent epidemic. As has been mentioned, it affects more people in Scotland than cancer—its prevalence is about 3 to 4 per cent. It can have a huge impact on people's ability to deal with their daily living, and on families. It can hugely affect people's ability to go about their day-to-day lives, including work. Kenny Gibson has highlighted that well, and I will not rehearse it further.

The outlook and prognosis for those living with chronic kidney disease have improved immeasurably over the years. Many conditions are now treatable and manageable in the long term, and the advances in transplant technology and its availability over the years are incredible.

I am a registered nurse, and I worked in California, albeit a long time ago. I had the privilege to be part of the liver transplant team and, on many occasions, took part in kidney and pancreas transplants. I put on record my thanks to everyone in the transplant and dialysis teams and all the support services for all that they do to improve the lives of their patients. The teams offer hope to many who might previously have had no options.

In NHS Dumfries and Galloway, in my region, over recent years, there has been an expansion in dialysis services. As well as the site at Mountainhall treatment centre—the previous Dumfries and Galloway Royal infirmary site—there are dialysis sites in Stranraer and Kirkcudbright. That saves those who need dialysis as part of their chronic kidney disease treatment from travelling long distances to Dumfries three times a week. I imagine that that would have been quite cumbersome for people before the Stranraer and Kirkcudbright sites opened.

Home-first dialysis also offers the potential for a better quality of life for those who receive treatment—in particular, those living in rural areas, who face the biggest practical barriers, as I have just described, to accessing that life-saving support. It will not be suitable for everyone, but we should strive to make it the default position for those for whom it is suitable, as it will support patients and reduce the pressure on secondary care facilities in our NHS. That embedding of treatment for kidney diseases in our communities is hugely welcome and is evidence of how our health service is developing in the right direction as resources allow and as the medical technology that is available for treatment improves all the time.

Embedding also has to include primary care at the GP or community health level. We need to ensure that those professionals who are usually

the first to see patients presenting with symptoms have the necessary tools and training to make that diagnosis and get the earliest possible intervention put in place, whether that be a referral to secondary care or simply the identification and management of issues at the local level.

Early intervention is key. As with many other conditions, the longer that problems are left untreated, the greater is the potential for long-term complications and more serious medical intervention. Given the way in which CKD interacts with other health conditions—for example, the risk of its association with high cholesterol and high blood pressure—identifying it at an early stage offers the potential for interventions targeted at those conditions, thereby boosting the health outcomes not just in renal health but across the board.

I do not have time today to delve into the detail of the implications of CKD at stage 1 through to stage 4. That would take a whole lecture. However, I welcome the Government's on-going work on the long-term conditions strategy. The consultation on that has closed recently. I am sure that the Government is working to determine the process for moving forward, so I look forward to hearing the minister's response.

Again, I thank all our dedicated professionals across our NHS, and campaign groups such as Kidney Research UK, for their support towards improving the prognosis for everybody who is affected.

17:59

Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate Kenneth Gibson on bringing an important issue to the chamber. I have previously considered it as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, which is when I first researched chronic kidney disease. I was surprised to find that 10 per cent of Scotland's population are living with the condition—that would be more than 90,000 people in the NHS Lothian area. Despite that prevalence, it is not an issue that has drawn much attention. A third of people with CKD are not even diagnosed, according to Kidney Research UK.

Chronic kidney disease refers to a range of conditions that affect the functioning of the kidneys. It overlaps with many other conditions, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease, and it can be treated through lifestyle changes such as exercise. It is therefore right that we should look to raise awareness.

I welcome the progress that has been made on CKD in recent years, including reimbursing people for the electricity costs of at-home dialysis. Many people who are in the later stages of CKD spend hours in hospital—sometimes three days a week—undergoing treatment. Members will appreciate how that could upend people's lives and take them away from work, their families and the things that they enjoy.

At-home dialysis can lessen the burden and give people back control over their conditions. It can also free up NHS staff time and lessen the burden on health services. However, only about 12.5 per cent of patients are currently treated at home. Given the benefit, I struggle to believe that that is a true reflection of demand. Other countries, such as Sweden and Finland, are looking to increase self-care to 50 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. We should have a similar ambition, so that everyone who wants at-home care can access it.

However, as with most conditions, our focus should be on prevention and ensuring that as few people as possible get to the point at which they require dialysis. That involves raising awareness of chronic kidney disease through education, and informing those with conditions that put them more at risk about how to manage their conditions. It also involves supporting primary care to reach out to the communities and groups that are most affected, especially ethnic minorities, who are seven times more likely to face kidney failure in their lives.

Kidney Research UK's action plan for Scotland says that the current approach is "haphazard", with huge variation from practice to practice. The argument for a specific policy focus is a reasonable one.

Chronic kidney disease does not have to be something that is caught when it is too late or something that takes over a person's life. The upcoming long-term conditions strategy is an opportunity to ensure that that is the case.

18:03

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind): I, like others, thank Kenny Gibson for lodging the motion. I welcome people to the public gallery tonight.

The motion rightly recognises the immense impact that chronic kidney disease has on individuals, families and our NHS. I declare a slight interest, Deputy Presiding Officer. When I was a teenager, I was going to go through some surgery and had a body scan. Through the body scan, we could not find any kidneys. However, as Kenny Gibson pointed out, the kidney is a secret worker, so I presume that because I am standing here tonight, something is happening in my body.

CKD is one of the most common and resource-intensive long-term conditions in Scotland, yet, as others have pointed out, it remains one of the few

areas that does not have a dedicated policy with a real focus. We have heard tonight that that must change, because we know about the scale of the challenge. Thousands of people across Scotland rely on dialysis every single week, while others live with a kidney transplant and many remain at risk of disease progression. That demands action, because dialysis is not a treatment that one can simply fit in around ordinary life—it becomes life itself.

The NHS does extraordinary work, and, like others, I thank the extraordinary doctors and nurses who do that, but the system is under pressure and those with long-term conditions are often the first to feel the strain. For those living with chronic illness, equity means access to the right treatment, at the right time and in the right place, whether they live in the centre of Edinburgh or on a remote island in the Highlands, but we are falling short of that right now.

Rural patients face long and exhausting journeys to access treatment and people in our most deprived communities are 60 per cent more likely to develop chronic illness, including kidney disease, and face a life expectancy that is up to 25 years shorter than that of those in our wealthiest areas. As we have heard from other speakers, ethnic minority patients encounter language and cultural barriers, and disabled people face hurdles with transport, accessibility and advocacy.

The challenges are not abstract; they are lived day in, day out. That is why it is so important that the Scottish Government makes CKD a specific strand in its long-term conditions strategy. I would be interested to hear whether the minister can, in her closing speech, confirm that the Scottish Government is heading towards that and tell us when we are likely to get there.

These are not luxuries; they are necessities. We know what works. Expanding home dialysis brings greater independence, improves quality of life and reduces pressure on hospital services. Increasing organ donation rates saves lives and eases demand. As Brian Whittle said, prevention through early screening in high-risk communities has the power to slow progression and reduce the long-term burdens on patients and the NHS alike.

International examples show us what can be achieved and what we should be aiming for. For example, in Australia's Northern Territory, mobile dialysis units have transformed care for remote communities, proving that geography need not dictate outcomes. Scotland can, and should, be as bold, but that cannot be done by Government alone. It requires action from doctors, third sector organisations, industry and from patients themselves, whose voices must shape the services that they rely on.

Chronic disease is not only a medical condition; it dictates how you shape your life day in, day out. We need action and I look forward to hearing from the minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jenni Minto to respond to the debate.

18:07

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I, too, thank Kenneth Gibson for his motion and thank members from across the chamber for their helpful contributions.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that all people in Scotland who live with long-term conditions, including chronic kidney disease—CKD—are able to access the best possible care and support and can benefit from healthcare services that are safe and effective and that put people at the centre of their own care. I thank all the organisations that are here tonight and the individuals who help and support those with CKD.

I will first respond to the points made by Mr Gibson and others about the long-term conditions framework. That framework recognises that, although every condition is different, there are universal standards that everyone should expect, no matter which condition they have. I thank Kidney Care UK, Kidney Research UK and the chronic kidney disease working group of Kidney Research UK in Scotland for contributing to the consultation on the framework, as well as thanking everyone else who contributed to our public consultation. We received 371 validated responses to that consultation and an analysis report will be published in October.

We will soon announce the governance arrangements, including the role of the third sector and those with lived experience in the development of the framework's action plans. The Scottish Government and I place a huge importance on hearing from organisations representing people with long-term conditions and hearing directly from people with lived experience. That will be an important aspect of how we develop the framework and the on-going action plans to improve services for people with long-term conditions, including CKD, especially in highlighting inequalities.

I note the important role that the third sector has played over the years in driving improvements in condition-specific strategies. We want to ensure that kidney organisations can play that role, too. Importantly, this will be an opportunity for kidney organisations, as well as organisations representing other conditions, to come together and work collaboratively with the Scottish Government on improving care for people with

long-term conditions. I very much look forward to meeting Kidney Care UK soon to discuss the framework and to attending Kidney Research UK's summit in the next few weeks.

I also want to note where our wider Government policies deliver the asks of the motion regarding prevention, early diagnosis, equitable access to transplantation, a home-first approach to dialysis care and improving donation rates. That is important, as I agree with the points that Brian Whittle and others made about the impact that those issues can have on people and on Scotland's economy.

In the "NHS Scotland Operational Improvement Plan" document, which was published on 31 March, the cabinet secretary set out that we will work to ensure that people receive the right care in the right place. Home dialysis can offer many benefits to NHS boards and patients, as many members have said.

Last year, we implemented a Scotland-wide policy of reimbursing home dialysis patients for the extra electricity costs incurred in their treatment, as Foysol Choudhury noted. That removes the financial disincentive to choose home dialysis over in-centre treatments, allowing personal choice in where and how to receive treatment, whether people are in a rural, urban or island community. I note the targets that the Nordic countries are aiming for, which Mr Choudhury mentioned, and I will take them into further consideration.

I will quickly respond to Kenneth Gibson's points about transport and, in doing so, thank Kidney Care UK for its in-centre dialysis transport report, "Left to get on with it". In October 2024, we published the "Transport to Health Delivery Plan" document, which sets out 20 commitments across the Scottish Government and partners. We look forward to hearing from a short-life working group that was created by the chief executives of NHS boards to address the issue of transport and renal dialysis access. Once we get the outputs from that, we will consider them closely.

Our cardiovascular disease risk factors programme is undertaking work in that area, with the aim of reducing avoidable CVD death by 20 per cent in 20 years by improving the identification and management of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, raised blood sugars, obesity and smoking. As part of that programme, we have committed to supporting 100,000 patients with enhanced-service GP appointments by March 2026 for those key risk factors, with a particular focus on supporting people living in areas of deprivation.

The Scottish Government is also committed to improving outcomes for people living with diabetes. Through sustained investment, innovation and strategic policy, we are transforming diabetes care to reduce complications and support long-term health. Notably, more than £42 million has been invested in the type 2 diabetes prevention framework, supporting early intervention and remission strategies such as the Counterweight plus programme.

Through the actions that are set out in the "Donation and Transplantation Plan for Scotland: 2021-2026" document, the Scottish Government is committed to increasing organ donation numbers and access to life-changing and life-saving transplantation. I thank Christine Grahame for hosting, in September, a parliamentary event focused on organ donation, as we need to work to increase the number of organ donations that are made. Key to that is ensuring that as many people as possible have registered their decision on the organ donor register. Scotland has a good record on that in comparison with other parts of the UK, with 57.9 per cent of the population now having recorded their decision.

Christine Grahame: Do we have any idea why the rate of organ donation has fallen? The legislation that we introduced was supposed to make organ donation easier and much more accessible. Do we have any idea why that is not the case?

Jenni Minto: We need to recognise that, although one big launch does a lot, we need to continue to get that information out there, which is why I am pleased that we will be conducting a Scottish Government-led publicity campaign.

As Christine Grahame says, we have done well, but we must do more. That is why, during this year's organ and tissue donation week, in September, we will be encouraging as many more people as possible to register. That is the best way to ensure that people's wishes in respect of donation are respected.

The Government is committed to supporting everyone to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives. We know that improvements to the health of our population have stalled and that inequalities have widened in recent years, which experts attribute to the combined impacts of UK Government austerity policies, Brexit, the Covid pandemic and the cost of living crisis, and that incidence of non-communicable disease is forecast to rise if action is not taken to prevent those illnesses.

Brian Whittle regularly—perhaps in every speech that he makes regarding health—talks about prevention, and I hope that he has read and supports our recently published population health framework, which was co-authored with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and sets

out our 10-year strategy to improve the wider determinants of Scotland's health through a whole-system, cross-Government and cross-sector approach that is focused on prevention. As Jackie Baillie said, that work has to be anchored within our communities.

A key priority of the framework is to improve levels of healthy weight, including by ensuring that a healthy diet is accessible and affordable to all. By shifting the focus from treating illness to preventing it, addressing the root cause of poor health and targeting our efforts where they are needed most, we can ensure lasting improvements for this generation and the next.

One of the most life-affirming experiences that I have had was witnessing a live kidney organ transplant and meeting families who have benefited from that amazing surgery. I was struck by their humbling appreciation and their wish to give back to society by encouraging people to register and raising awareness by sharing their stories.

Like Emma Harper, I pay tribute to the fantastic teams of nurses, clinicians and scientists from our NHS who support and care for those living with chronic kidney disease and, of course, the third sector organisations, many of whom are represented here. I thank Kenneth Gibson for bringing this important motion to the chamber.

Meeting closed at 18:17.

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