



Crisis in Gaza



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I think the recent attacks by Israeli forces on Gaza have been disproportionate, counter-productive and entirely wrong.

As soon as the attacks began I joined other MPs in a call for an immediate ceasefire. A group of around 100 MPs sent letters to the Foreign Secretary asking for his help in bringing about the ceasefire. In January I led a delegation of women and children to 10 Downing Street to hand in a letter to the Prime Minister calling for action

by the British government.

The Department for International Development has made nearly £27 million available for urgent humanitarian needs such as food and medical supplies.

But in the long-term I think we need to see a suspension of EU-Israel trade agreements and the suspension of the sale of arms and military parts to the region. We need to lift economic blockades to Gaza to give the people living there a real chance to rebuild their lives.

Financial Downturn Hits

Although a financial crisis has been predicted for quite a long time, it is no less shocking to see high street stalwarts like Woolworths go under.

My concern is that ordinary people are going to feeling the squeeze whilst City bankers walk away with their bonuses. I have called on the government to force banks to change

their bonus culture—and to pass on profits to customers. It's also vital to have a strong system to help people who are facing unemployment, who are unable to pay their mortgages, or who have trouble paying their fuel bills. I am determined to ensure my constituents are not left out in the cold during the financial crisis.

Save Our Cinema



Hearing an update on the Save our Cinema campaign

This summer has seen renewed vigour in a campaign to turn a disused Clapton building into a cinema.

Back in 1910 229 Lower Clapton Road was opened as a cinema. It continued as a popular social spot right up until 1979 when it closed down. The building lay empty until 1983 when it was bought and turned into a nightclub. Unfortunately this led to some infamous shootings taking place in the area including one fatality that forced the club to close for a temporary period.

At that time local residents, the police and I fought a campaign to permanently close the Palace Pavilion for the safety of local

residents.

Whilst residents were happy when the nightclub was finally closed down forever last year, no-one wants to see an empty building going to waste.

The Friends of Clapton Cinema group aims to get the building reopened as a cinema for the whole community to enjoy. I wholeheartedly support his campaign and have written to the Council and the Mayor of London showing my support. I believe a cinema would be of great benefit to our young people and provide a focal point for the community.

If you agree you can register your support at:

<http://www.saveourcinema.org>

Give Coal the Boot



Meeting with local residents to discuss the continued use of coal power

In October I had a visit from members of Greenpeace in Hackney.

Greenpeace has launched a campaign to stop the use of coal as an energy source. The Give Coal the Boot campaign aims to highlight the amount of coal we are still using in this country. Unfortunately we are currently using a lot of imported coal from Russia, Australia and South Africa.

This not only means more use of the dirty fuel but also that energy is wasted getting the coal here in the first place.

Members of Greenpeace in Hackney presented me with a cooling

tower they had constructed out of supporters' footprints. The footprints represent the people in Hackney who would like to give coal the boot.

I agree we need to spend more time and money exploring the alternatives to coal. Putting funding into renewable energy is a double-bonus—it creates new jobs and it can end our reliance on fossil fuels.

In other environment news—there was an opposition vote on the third runway at Heathrow in January. Along with 27 other Labour MPs I voted against the runway. The campaign to stop the runway from being built continues.

Olympic Update



Construction work on the Olympic Park is steaming ahead, with many of the original deadlines being surpassed.

The number of people working on the site is set to double in 2009, making it the largest construction project in Europe.

More and more people who were previously unemployed now have work on the Park. At the moment about 9% of the Olympic workforce were unemployed before they got an Olympic job. And currently around a quarter of all people employed in construction work on the site are local residents.

These figures are heartening but not necessarily good enough.

Apart from anything else, Hackney people still have fewer Olympic jobs than the other 4 Host Boroughs (Newham, Greenwich, Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets).

Over the winter I've had meetings with the organisation responsible for helping Hackney residents apply for jobs. I've also seen the Council representatives in charge of Olympics jobs. I am concerned that not enough is being done to advertise vacancies to people in Hackney. Local residents need to know what jobs are available and they need access and knowledge of the application process.

I look forward to working through these problems with the ODA and the Council as work on the Olympic Park continues.

Equality for Northern Ireland Women

In 1967 one of the most important laws for women's rights was passed.

The 1967 Abortion Act made abortion under certain circumstances legal. This gave women a vital power over their own bodies and meant that women with crisis pregnancies had real options.

Unfortunately unlike other laws, the Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland when Direct Rule was implemented.

This means that women in Northern Ireland have no legal access to abortion unless giving birth would kill them. Women who have been raped, are victims of incest, or who are very young have no right to

abortion.

Women in Northern Ireland must travel abroad to have an abortion—and must pay to have the procedure privately instead of getting it on the NHS.

To me this is a glaring inequality. Maintaining different laws is like saying that women in Northern Ireland are second class citizens. I attempted to change the law by tabling an amendment to the Human Embryology and Fertilisation Bill. Unfortunately there was no time to debate my amendment and so it was dropped. I am now working with women's organisations to find a way we can bring equality to women in Northern Ireland.



Protesting outside Parliament with women from Northern Ireland

In the House



Olympic jobs: I spoke during an Opposition Day debate on the Olympic Legacy. I argued that figures for local people working on the Park are low, and that the statistics were confusing. It is not clear if workers who are called “local” are long-standing residents or if they are labourers living in the area temporarily.

Speakers’ Conference: I am a member of the Speakers’ Conference which was set up to investigate the lack of diversity in Parliament and in politics generally. I think that good representation is essential if members of the public are to have faith in the political process.

Child Protection: I spoke out in the House against the horrific treatment of Baby P. I argued that more responsibility needs to lie with the Council and

social work chiefs where this case took place. There needs to be more accountability to stop tragic events like this occurring.

Secondary Breast Cancer: I congratulated the government on their tireless work on cancer care in this country. But I pointed out that more still needs to be done to change some communities’ perception of cancer. Some communities in my constituency see cancer as a shameful disease and this can lead to late diagnosis.

City Bonuses: I spoke out against the culture of bonuses in city banks. I pointed out that these grotesque bonuses were based on immense risk-taking and that the government must do all it can to ensure big banks no longer operate in this way.

LSBC Academic Achievement Awards



The LSBC Academic Achievement Awards are about rewarding Black students in London who have achieved top academic grades. The idea is to counteract the negative press that young Black people can get in the media.

This year the awards ceremony was bigger and better than ever before. Celebrity speakers Lenny Henry and Sir Trevor McDonald were on hand to congratulate our young awardees and we were also joined by various parliamentarians.

The young people who received

awards the ceremony are real role models who show that hard work and dedication pay off.

Three young people from Hackney were given prizes this year. Sekinat Yusuf went to Hackney Free and Parochial School where she received top GCSE grades and even took time out to build a dental care centre in Kenya. Ayoola Awopetu lives in Stoke Newington and gained a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery from St George’s, University of London. And Iskander Ibrahim lives in Hackney and graduated this year from St Mary’s, University of London

