

An immediate bilateral ceasefire in Israel and Gaza

As Liberal Democrats, we have always stood in support of a lasting peace and a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine. In the face of the horrific violence of the last few weeks, we are clear that a lasting peace is the only way to guarantee the dignity and security which both Palestinians and Israelis deserve.

Hamas' terrorist attacks on October 7th shocked the world. We condemned them and the taking of hostages, unequivocally. Hamas cannot, for the security of Israelis nor the future of Palestinians, be allowed to continue in charge of Gaza.

Right now we have a disaster. When I met with NGOs working on the ground in Gaza, they told me just how devastating a humanitarian catastrophe we are facing.

Thousands of innocent civilians have already been killed, including thousands of children. I met the Palestinian Ambassador just days ago – tragically he had lost family members. I passed on my condolences on behalf of the Liberal Democrats to all Palestinians.

And the humanitarian crisis just seems to get worse. Essential supplies like water, food, medicine and fuel still remain in very short supply or totally cut off from Gaza. And 200 people are still held hostage, including children. And the risk of regional escalation grows by the day, underlined by the fact that the UK withdrew diplomatic staff from Lebanon earlier this week.

More than a month since Hamas' atrocities, it is increasingly clear that a military solution to eliminate Hamas is not possible. Nor is it tenable for Israel to reoccupy Gaza.

Only a sustained political and diplomatic solution will resolve this conflict and deliver a lasting peace. We urgently need movement towards that solution now.

But how? The answer is via an immediate bilateral ceasefire.

It is important to be clear. Some who call for a ceasefire really seem to mean freezing the conflict. But that's not acceptable. It leaves Hamas in place in Gaza.

My meeting with families whose loved ones are, right now, being held hostage in Gaza made it very clear to me that such an outcome is unacceptable. And so too is it unacceptable for Palestinians. They deserve a state of their own, and security, just as Israelis do too.

Freezing the conflict doesn't look to the future and will do nothing to bring about that long term security.

That's why a ceasefire cannot be an end in itself, even though it is very clearly needed now to stop the bloodshed and trauma for Palestinians and Israelis. It is temporary by its very definition: it is a step towards peace. And it is contingent upon both parties sticking to it. If one party breaks the ceasefire, a military option remains on the table.

I am not naive about the difficulties involved in getting to this position – it may require a cessation in hostilities, as we have already called for, to create the basis for a ceasefire, and we welcome any progress however small towards this goal, including the hours in specific areas committed to by Israel. Nor will it be easy to rid Gaza of Hamas.

Maximum pressure now needs to be applied on all parties, with tough conditions carefully monitored and verified. That will require a huge and sustained effort from the international community and the UN, with a particular role to be played by Arab neighbours.

Our job – and the job of the whole international community – is to bring an end to this conflict, and stop the killing of thousands of innocent civilians, while ensuring that we do not return to how things were before October 7th.

Movement towards a political solution, putting us back on the path to two states, is needed more than ever.

Right now, we simply cannot afford not to try.

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[Islamophobia Awareness Month](#)

Today marks the beginning of Islamophobia Awareness Month – where we acknowledge the anti-Muslim hatred that is too prevalent in our society, and reflect on how we can stamp it out in all its forms.

This year, Islamophobia Awareness Month coincides with an incredibly difficult time for Muslim communities here in the UK. **The reverberations of the horrifying Israel-Gaza conflict have led to an unacceptable rise in both Antisemitism and Islamophobia across our country.**

The figures are stark. Anti-Islamophobic organisation Tell Mama received 515 reports of anti-Muslim incidents between just 7th and 29th October – a sevenfold increase from the same period in 2022. Similarly, the Metropolitan police has recorded a 140% increase in Islamophobic offences this month compared to the same period last year.

And the stories accompanying these statistics are just as disturbing. From reports of Muslim communities being targeted at public transport hubs, to concerns raised with me by my local mosque.

We cannot let this type of hate fester.

There is simply no place for Islamophobia in our society, in any form. And it's incumbent on all of us with a public platform to stand up against hatred of all kinds, including Islamophobia, Antisemitism, and racism.

I'm proud of the work that Liberal Democrats have done to combat religious hatred, and will continue to do. In light of recent events, many of our calls now feel even more timely.

Like giving law enforcement the resources and training they need to identify and prevent hate crimes, including threats and incitement to violence on social media. And providing funding for protective security measures to public spaces that are vulnerable to hate crime, like places of worship, schools and community centres.

Now more than ever, it is vital that we stand up against all forms of Islamophobia, and work together to end religious hatred everywhere.

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Author:

[Wera Hobhouse passes new law to protect people from workplace harassment](#)

Lib Dem MP, Wera Hobhouse's Worker Protection Bill cleared its final legislative hurdle today and is set to receive Royal Assent. The new law will give protections to employees from sexual harassment in the workplace.

Harassment in the workplace is a blight on society. It is widespread, it ruins lives and impacts effective working relationships in all walks of life. Not a week goes by without revelations of inappropriate behaviour in an organisation somewhere in the UK.

The Bill makes employers liable to their employees if they have not taken reasonable steps to prevent harassment. Shocking figures from the House of Commons Library have revealed that **one in five people have experience sexual harassment in the workplace every year.**

The Bill presents an opportunity to shift the culture in our workplaces where

harassment is no longer tolerated. It will create a duty on employers to prevent harassment from happening and should bring about a long-term change in attitudes.

I am proud to have worked alongside brilliant organisations such as the Fawcett Society and the wider Alliance for Women, who continue to support this Bill because of the substantial difference it will make to workers' lives. I am also grateful to the Minister for Women for her support, and to Baroness Burt, who worked tirelessly to steer this Bill through the Lords."

Wera Hobhouse

Employees should not have to wait any longer for safe and respectful workplaces. The passage of this Bill will send a clear signal that such behaviour is unacceptable, and that we take the protections of employees seriously.

Read the Bill

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[Taking a Stand for Mental Health](#)

These last few years have been tough and there was already a children's mental health crisis before the pandemic.

The Conservatives left the severe mental health crisis unchecked before, during and after the pandemic. The number of children with probable mental health disorders rose from one in nine in 2017, to one in six children in 2021.

People are struggling. And when they turn for help, it is often not there. Problems that can start small, become crises as help is either not available, or arrives too late.

The majority of parents are concerned with their children's mental health. But nearly a quarter of parents do not know where to turn for help with these problems.

No one should be stuck in the awful position of waiting months on end for mental health services.

Our Plan to Improve Mental Health Care

- **Walk-In Centres for Young People** – Roll out community mental health hubs for children and young people in every area of the country, to provide early prevention and support.
- **A Mental Health Practitioner in Every School** – Provide dedicated,

qualified mental health practitioners to every school and roll out a national wellbeing survey in secondary schools, along the lines of the 'Bee Well' pilot currently being run in Greater Manchester.

- **Mental Health MOT** – Check ups at key points in people's lives when they are most vulnerable to mental ill-health.
 - **End Out of Area Placements** – Increase capacity and coordination between mental health services so that no one is treated far from home.
 - **Expand Young People's Mental Health Services Up to the Age of 25** – Rapidly expand effective and age-appropriate mental health support beyond the age of 18 so that all under 25 year olds are able to access mental health support when they need it.
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End Mental Health Injustice

Liberal Democrats are fighting for a fair deal where mental and physical health are treated equally.

If you agree we need to fix mental health services, join our campaign today.

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[10 things Rishi Sunak didn't mention](#)

Rishi Sunak's speech was so out of touch he may as well have been living on another planet.

He had nothing new to say on the big issues facing families, from the cost of living crisis to local health services that have been run into the ground.



1. Mortgages

The average mortgage has gone up by £220 a month in the year since the catastrophic mini Budget, according to the Bank of England.



2. Food prices

Food prices have risen by 10% in the past year as the cost of living goes through the roof.



3. Energy bills

One in three families across England will pay higher energy bills this winter than last, rising to one in two poorer households.



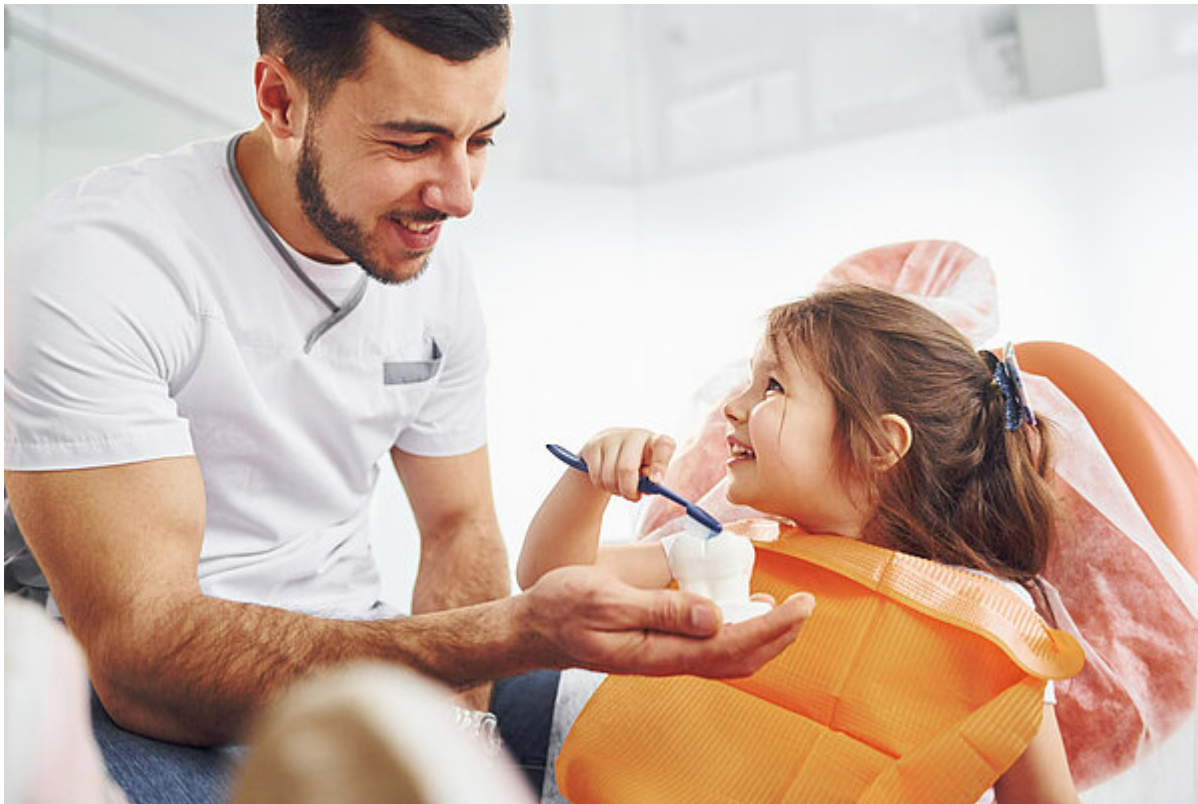
4. Ambulances

Ambulance delays were their worst on record last winter and there has been no clear plan on how to prevent a similar crisis this time round.



5. Sewage

Raw sewage was dumped into rivers and coastlines 824 times a day last year after Conservative MPs have repeatedly voted to allow water companies to continue the filthy practice.



6. Dentists

4.4 million children did not see an NHS dentist in the past 12 months despite NHS recommending that they go once a year



7. Pensions

12 million pensioners could lose out after Rishi Sunak failed to commit to keeping the triple lock in future years.



8. Rents

Rents have risen by an average of £110 per month over the past year since the mini budget sent interest rates soaring.



9. Concrete roofs (RAAC)

41 hospitals and 174 schools are impacted by the RAAC scandal which Sunak failed to mention once despite his own role in slashing funding to fix crumbling buildings.



10. Sleaze

Rishi Sunak didn't mention disgraced ministers like Liz Truss, Boris Johnson or Chris Pincher who have received over £500,000 in taxpayer payouts after quitting or being sacked.

Our hospitals are crumbling and children are waiting in pain to see an NHS dentist, but Sunak has nothing more to offer than more broken promises and empty words.

The Conservative Party is out of touch, out of ideas and deserves to be kicked out of office. The sooner we can have a general election so the British people can put this government out of their misery the better.

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