

My visit to Israel and Palestine

We've all been appalled by the shocking and tragic events in the Middle East over the past few months.

There is a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, and it is only growing. Thousands of innocent Palestinians have been killed and around 1.5 million have been displaced to Rafah where they are fearing for their lives, as the prospect of an IDF offensive looms.

The appalling hostage situation continues – with more than 100 people still held by Hamas following the utterly deplorable terrorist attacks carried out by the group on 7 October.

Liberal Democrats have been calling for an immediate bilateral ceasefire for months – to put an end to the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, get the hostages home, and finally deliver a path to the two state solution.

The impact of this conflict has been felt deeply not just across the region, but in the UK too, in particular the Jewish, Palestinian and Muslim communities.

Since 7 October, I, [Layla Moran](#) and [Christine Jardine](#) have met with many impacted groups – such as those working to combat soaring antisemitism and Islamophobia, NGOs working in Gaza, and families whose loved ones are being held hostage by Hamas.

But as the devastation from the conflict only continues to mount, I felt that it was necessary to visit the region myself – to meet people in Israel and Palestine whose lives have been turned upside down by the conflict, and speak to politicians and civil society about how to secure two states and a lasting peace.

I have just returned from my visit to Israel and Palestine. Here's what I saw, heard and learnt on the trip:



I saw the bullet hole-ridden, blown-out houses of the Kfar Aza kibbutz, one of the many places attacked by Hamas on 7 October, and a place where many peace activists had lived.

I also travelled to the site of the music festival at Re'im where over 300 people were tragically murdered, and where many are now paying their respects to friends and relatives.



At the Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem, I met six-month old triplets whose mother is stuck in Gaza and cannot get a permit to travel to Jerusalem to be with her children.

I spoke with hospital administrators who told me that the hospital is struggling financially after Israel withheld funding from the Palestinian Authority last year.



Itzik Horn's sons Eitan and Yair were taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October.

He described to me the anguish he is living with, not being able to know exactly where his sons are and in what condition they're in.

Meeting with Palestinian NGOs working on the ground in Gaza, they explained how what was already a humanitarian crisis in the Strip before October has now become catastrophic. They also spoke about how the West Bank now faces an unprecedented situation, with settler violence spiking.

At the Knesset – the Israeli Parliament – I held a constructive meeting with Yair Lapid, leader of our liberal sister party in Israel as well as Leader of the Opposition to Netanyahu's government, and discussed the importance of removing Netanyahu from power – both for Israelis and Palestinians.



Visiting Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial, I laid a wreath on behalf of our party in memory of the millions of Jews murdered during the Holocaust.



I learned about the impact of illegal settlement expansion on Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, which is making two-states ever harder to achieve.



The United Nations Humanitarian Agency, UNOCHA, explained to me their assessment of the dire crisis facing Palestinians if the IDF commences an offensive in Rafah.

It's very clear that both Israelis and Palestinians are suffering deep and ongoing trauma from the 7 October attacks and the humanitarian situation in Gaza. In an environment of such grief and loss, it would be easy to write off the prospects of a future peace. But my belief that we cannot go back to the way things were before – that a two-state solution is the only way to ensure nothing like this happens again – has only been strengthened.

It's also apparent that the illegal Israeli settler movement is having a very negative impact on the ground in the West Bank, actively working to prevent a future two state solution. Settler violence against Palestinians has spiked since October 7 and is having a destabilising effect right now in the West Bank – which is a tinderbox. The settlements are a breach of international law.

Since my return, I have called for the far-right Israeli ministers and extremist leaders of the illegal settlement movement, [Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, to be sanctioned by the UK.](#)



Our Foreign Affairs spokespersons Layla Moran and Lord Purvis also both recently visited the region. You can learn more about their visit [here](#) and [here](#).

Liberal Democrats will continue to stand up for international law and for a lasting peace. It is the only way to secure the dignity and security that Israelis and Palestinians deserve, ensuring that the events we have seen these past few months never happen again.

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Author:

[It's time to ban conversion therapy for good](#)

Tomorrow, my bill to ban conversion therapy will be debated in the House of Lords.

It's too easy to think of these practices as a remnant from the past. Sadly, this is far from the reality. The Government's own research has shown that 7% of LGBT+ people had undergone or been offered conversion therapy.

This is an appalling statistic. Sexual orientation or gender identity is not a problem to be treated and 'cured'. It's who we are – and these practices have got to stop.

But time and again, the Conservative Government has broken their promise to deliver a conversion therapy ban. Five years on, we cannot afford to waste any more time.

We cannot leave the LGBT+ community unprotected against these harms for any longer.

That's why I have tabled a bill which will make it an offence for any person to practise, or offer to practise, conversion therapy.

My bill seeks to be as comprehensive as possible, to make sure that all LGBT+ people are protected and no loopholes can persist. And it will focus on the intended purpose of the practice – ensuring that genuine psychological or religious support without a predetermined goal isn't caught up in a ban.

Of course, this isn't the first time us Liberal Democrats have been at the forefront of the fight for LGBT+ equality.

From Ed Davey moving the clause to repeal Section 28, to Lynne Featherstone's tireless work in getting the Same Sex Marriage Act passed, we have a long, proud history of delivering change for the LGBT+ community.

It is my sincere hope that we can do the same with this bill.

There is still a long road ahead. The only way to get this bill passed is with support from the Government. So we will be pushing Conservative ministers to do the right thing and back our bill.

In the past weeks, I have been amazed to see a positive response from so many of my colleagues in the House of Lords. I have been busy meeting with parliamentarians from all parties and none to discuss how we can work together to deliver a ban.

It's clear that there is cross-party consensus. So we will keep working together on this.

Because it isn't about party politics. **It's about finally delivering the change the LGBT+ community deserves.** And I will keep doing everything in my power to make this a reality.

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Author:

Munira Wilson introduces Schools' Mental Health Bill to Parliament

Childhood is supposed to be a happy time, filled with cherished memories and laughter. However, for too many it can also be a very difficult time. Headteachers say that there are numerous pressing challenges facing our education system and many come from outside of the classroom. Mental health is among the biggest.

According to recent data, it is estimated that one in five children between the ages of 7 to 16 have a probable mental health disorder. Early intervention is crucial. Research tells us that half of all lifetime mental health disorders start before the age of 14. Stepping in as soon as warning signs start to show can often help to prevent conditions from becoming more severe.

Our Bill would place a dedicated qualified mental health practitioner in every school – primary and secondary – giving every child in school access to care and support from the moment they start needing it.

“This Bill is an investment in our future, and it is an investment we must make. Because we owe it to this generation of young people.” [@Munirawilson](#) introduces her bill to Parliament, which would place a qualified mental health professional in every school. pic.twitter.com/rVJTLtGegd

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [January 9, 2024](#)

Currently help that is available is stretched thinly across many local primary and secondary schools, which means their valuable skills and service is only available about half a day per week in many schools. Children who are waiting for mental health support miss substantial amounts of schooling and this absence has a huge impact on their life chances. We cannot wait to tackle this issue.

Our Bill makes clear funding needs to be made available for this proposed statutory duty for all state schools. Using the “polluter pays” principle, Liberal Democrats have proposed funding these mental health practitioners through tripling the digital services tax on our big social media companies, given the harm they have contributed to our children’s mental health.

There is a tidal wave of mental ill health among our children and young people. It is jeopardising their current wellbeing, their education, their prospects, and their long-term health. Professionals from the education sector, mental health sector, and other public services all agree that something more has to be done. Putting a mental health practitioner in every school is an important step in tackling this vital issue.

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Author:

[Ed Davey's Tory Removal Service](#)

The Liberal Democrats are the leading Conservative MP removal service in the Blue Wall and beyond. Four historic by-election wins and sweeping gains in last May's local elections show that voters across the country are turning to us for change.

People are fed up with waiting for promised hospitals that are never built, waiting for an end to sewage being dumped in our rivers and waiting for real action on the cost of living.

To kickstart his Surrey campaign tour, Ed Davey drove a poster van advertising 'Ed Davey's Tory Removals' through Guildford, before addressing Lib Dem campaigners, activists and the party's local parliamentary candidate Zöe Franklin. The poster describes the Liberal Democrats as the "Blue Wall's Premium Conservative MP unseating service", with services including repairing NHS waiting times, ending raw sewage discharges and tackling the cost of living crisis.



It shouldn't be up to Rishi Sunak to cling on for another twelve months, desperately hoping for something to turn up and causing even more damage as he tries to keep his fractured party behind him.

That's why we're tabling a law to force a General Election, so we can send the movers into Number 10 and get rid of this out-of-touch Conservative

Government.

General Election NOW

Join our calls for an immediate General Election.

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Only we will fix the broken system

“Getting rid of the Conservatives will not be enough to bring about the radical change we need.”

That’s how Liberal Democrat Leader Ed Davey began his New Year message to the country. 2024 is almost certain to see Rishi Sunak call a general election, with April or May looking increasingly likely as Conservative Party infighting grows.

Ed made clear that defeating the Conservative Government is “absolutely necessary”, but argued it is “nowhere near enough to solve the big, deep-rooted challenges in our country” – from poverty and inequality to climate change.

Underpinning these huge challenges, he said, is “a political system that has been fundamentally broken for generations.”

Ed described it as “a two-party system that leaves millions feeling powerless and excluded; makes it impossible to hold those in power properly to account; rewards short-term self-interest at the expense of actual solutions; and serves no one, except the vested interests of the Conservative and Labour parties.”

Neither the Conservatives nor Labour can really tackle the country’s most serious problems, he argued, because they are both wedded to the current system, which “suits them just fine”.

Ed said Labour “think they can simply take their turn, without ever grappling with the big challenges we face, or the radical solutions they demand.”

He pointed to Labour’s support for Conservative spending plans – including the two-child limit for benefits and cuts to international aid – as well as their rejection of the Liberal Democrats’ clear, detailed plan to fix the UK’s broken relationship with Europe. “And, of course,” he said, “the Labour Party is still wedded to First Past the Post – even though the majority of

voters want change.”

“So it falls to us – to Liberal Democrats – to be the agents of change, once again.”

As Liberal Democrat campaigners make a flying start in 2024, Ed reminded the country why this year’s election is so important:

“Not just to beat the Conservatives, though beat them we must. Not just to change who sits in power, but to change where power sits. We must do nothing less than transform the nature of British politics for good.”

Ed’s New Year Message

As Liberal Democrats, we know: Getting rid of the Conservatives will not be enough to bring about the radical change we need. Though absolutely necessary, it is nowhere near enough to solve the big, deep-rooted challenges in our country.

The change we seek, the change our party has always sought, the change liberals have championed for generations – is so much bigger than that.

Because, beneath the daily stream of crisis and scandal, lie much older and more fundamental problems; that neither the Conservatives nor Labour are capable of tackling.

Entrenched poverty and inequality. Systemic injustice. Climate change and the nature crisis. Britain’s diminished standing in an increasingly authoritarian world. The concentration of so much power in the hands of so few.

And underpinning them all: A broken political system.

A political system that leaves millions feeling powerless and excluded. That makes it impossible to hold those in power properly to account. A political system that rewards short-term self-interest at the expense of actual solutions. A two-party system that serves no one, except the vested interests of the Conservative and Labour parties. That swings from blue to red and back again, while nothing really changes. A political system that has been fundamentally broken for generations.

And only we – Liberal Democrats – will fix it. No one else will.

Labour certainly won’t. They’ve made that crystal clear. Because the truth is – the current system suits Labour just fine. Yes, it lets the Conservatives in most of the time. But they are bound eventually to let people down so badly that Labour think they can simply take their turn; without ever having to actually offer a convincing vision of the future. Without ever grappling with the big challenges we face, or the radical solutions they demand.

So look what we have as a result:

A Labour Party fully signed up to Conservative spending plans; even when it means leaving millions of children to grow up in poverty. A Labour Party with nothing to say about Britain's place in the world; following the Conservatives' lead on cuts to the aid budget, and rejecting our plan to rebuild our critical relationship with Europe. And, of course, a Labour Party still wedded to First Past the Post; even though the majority of voters want change.

And so **it falls to us. To Liberal Democrats. To be the agents of change**, once again. And bring millions with us, to make it happen.

That's why cold hands clutch wet phones to canvass voters. Why worn-out shoes walk miles to put leaflets through letterboxes. Why tired voices urge neighbours to lend us their votes.

Not just to beat the Conservatives – though beat them we must. Not just to change who sits in power – but to change where power sits.

We must do nothing less than transform the nature of British politics for good.

Hand back far more control to individuals and communities. Fight for a fair deal, that empowers everyone, and holds the already powerful to account. Smash the two-party system, reform our elections, and give everyone an equal voice.

Because **that is the only way we can build a fairer, greener, more caring country.**

That is our goal. That is our calling.

So Happy New Year, and I'll see you out there!

Help us keep demanding change
– join our fight today.

[Yes, I'm in](#)

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Author: