

## Loss of life in Gaza must not be allowed to continue, says Roger

As the death toll of Palestinian civilians in Gaza mounts, Roger is among those calling for an immediate ceasefire on both sides and an end to a conflict which is becoming more bloody and pointless.

He commented: "This collective punishment of a civilian population, including children, who have already suffered so much under the blockade must not be allowed to drag on. Far too many innocent people have already died, while the international community has failed to negotiate a ceasefire let alone a lasting solution. For too long, the world has stood by and watched while the Palestinians have been treated as second-class citizens in their own country.

"I believe the time has now come for the international community to consider sanctions against Israel. The Israeli military cannot be allowed to continue treating an occupied and dispossessed population of frightened and traumatised civilians as if it were a military target. Both sides need to stop firing, and the world's leaders need to put pressure on Israel to negotiate a two-state solution. Otherwise, yet more lives will be pointlessly lost and the conflict will escalate and further destabilise the region."



Roger has written to the Foreign Secretary to raise his concerns about the collective punishment of Palestinians.



Roger has also tabled Written Parliamentary Questions urging the Business Secretary, Vince Cable, to consider bringing in a weapons embargo on the UK's trade with Israel, and to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Office what guarantees it has sought from Israel that weapons sold to it by the UK will not be used against civilians in Palestine.

Roger is one of a group of MPs who signed a letter on Gaza which was handed in to 10 Downing Street on Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> July, by Jeremy Corbyn MP on behalf of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

The letter was signed by 21,000 people including many well known and prominent people.

## G4S must stop its complicity in imprisoning Palestinian children

Roger was one of the signatories to a letter published in the [Guardian](#), protesting about British company G4S's

decision to provide security to Israeli prisons where Palestinian children are detained.



Military Court Watch, an Israeli NGO, carried out a detailed forensic review and found that over 50 per cent of children were arrested in night raids and 83 per cent of children were blindfolded. When its representatives viewed the trials of Palestinian children, they saw that they were all in leg shackles. Conviction rates stand at 99.7 per cent. Commented Roger: "For G4S to have any involvement in this abuse of children is utterly disgraceful."



## Sainsbury's — taste the indifference?

Roger is supporting a campaign urging Sainsbury's to stop sourcing products from illegal Israeli settlements.

Sainsbury's new Chief Executive, Mike Coupe, was taken to task at the company's AGM in London on 9<sup>th</sup> July by human rights organisations and groups working for justice for the Palestinians. A loud and lively protest outside was matched by lobbying and questions inside the Queen Elizabeth Conference Hall, as campaigners disputed Sainsbury's claims that it sources produce ethically. They accused the company of continuing trade deals with businesses which work in the illegal Israeli settlements, including the beleaguered company SodaStream - evidence, they say, that Sainsbury's does not practise what it preaches.



Spokesperson Hilary Smith said: "For over a year, we have been challenging Sainsbury's to live up to its claim to be the most ethical of the high street retailers. We want Sainsbury's to examine the practices of some of its partners in trade. In particular, we are concerned that some companies used by Sainsbury's are complicit in breaches of international law because of their work in the illegal Israeli settlements. We feel that such companies are unfit business partners – unfit in any capacity, not just in their work in the illegal settlements. Shareholders raised these issues at last year's AGM and were assured they would be considered seriously. Yet Sainsbury's still stocks goods from these companies; customers buy them, believing that Sainsbury's can be trusted to be ethical. We feel that customers' trust in Sainsbury's is misplaced."

Ms Smith cited "reliable evidence" that a number of Sainsbury's partners, including Mehadrin, operate extensively inside illegal Israeli settlements and that they have a track record of mislabelling the origin of their produce.

The campaigners pointed out that in September 2013, the UK government issued its action plan, "Good Business: Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on

Business.” This reminded businesses that they should treat as a legal compliance issue the risk of causing or contributing to gross human rights abuses wherever they operate. The document also referred to the need for companies in Britain to scrutinise their supply chains.

Mike Coupe and every member of the Sainsbury’s Board have received a letter, signed by a group of eminent individuals, including Roger, urging the company to dissociate itself from companies which profit from violations of international law and human rights. A dossier of evidence against specific Israeli companies, including Mehadrin and Edom, accompanied the letter.

Roger commented: “Companies which claim to do business ethically must act to live up to that promise. For Sainsbury’s to continue sourcing products produced by settlers illegally occupying Palestinian lands is unacceptable, particularly given the horrendous loss of life in the recent conflict. Sainsbury’s is responsible for the products it chooses to sell in its stores, and must now think seriously about the flaws in its current policy on sourcing products.”



**Roger writes to Minister for Work and Pensions and head of Capita to protest delays in processing PIP payments**

Roger has written to Iain Duncan Smith, the head of the Department for Work and Pensions, and Andy Parker, the Chief Executive of Capita, to protest about the effects of the long delays in processing claims for Personal Independence Payments. PIP is paid to people who are seriously ill or disabled in order to help them with the extra costs of their condition.

Unfortunately, despite the disastrous failure of Atos’ contract to handle ESA assessments, the Government decided to allow Atos and Capita to take on the contracts for carrying out PIP assessments. The consequence of this is that PIP costs almost three and a half times more to administer than the benefit it replaced, and takes twice as much time to process.

Roger commented: “I do not see how this serves either disabled citizens or the British taxpayer. The only people currently benefiting are the shareholders of Atos and Capita, who are making a profit at the expense of the wellbeing of seriously ill citizens.”

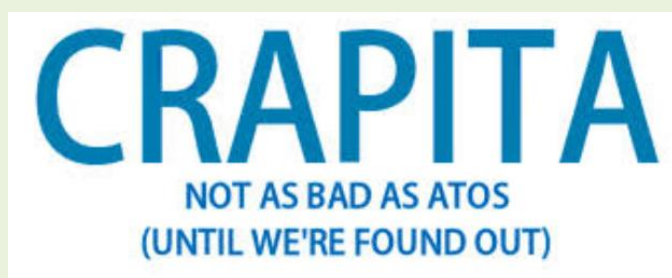


In the letters, Roger wrote: “The effects of these delays on disabled citizens cannot be overstated. At a time when they are already struggling to cope with severe health conditions, they are also forced to worry about paying the bills, paying the rent for their homes and putting food on the table, not to mention coping with the extra costs that come with disability. Many of the people who wrote to me about this emphasised that before they became disabled they had worked all their lives, paid taxes and never claimed benefits. They had paid into the system on the assumption that if they ever needed support the safety net would be there for them. They have now discovered that this is not the case.”



Roger was contacted by a man whose wife suffered a stroke, and who was still waiting for Capita to bother to turn up to assess her. He wrote: "It's seven months since we have any money coming in bar my wife's state pension. My savings are almost gone. The stress I am under is unbelievable. I just don't know where to turn. My wife is getting depressed, she just sits and cries on the days Capita don't turn up. She blames herself for having a stroke."

Said Roger: "I am appalled that this Government has once again permitted companies which are obviously inept and unscrupulous to be in charge of administering a benefit which is vital to the wellbeing of this country's most vulnerable citizens. I cannot understand how Atos in particular was permitted to be involved after the utter disaster of their handling of ESA claims. What on earth is the benefit to DWP or to the public purse of outsourcing services to private companies which perform them so poorly that they have to be redone, again at taxpayer expense? What is the benefit to society of pushing hard-working citizens into penury and misery because they have the misfortune to become ill?"



## Atos backlogs worsened by inability to recruit staff due to widespread loathing of the company by the public

Roger commented: "I recently had occasion to speak to Atos, to try to find out why a person who applied for ESA reassessment at the beginning of November had heard nothing by the end of June. I was told that Atos had been sitting on her file for more than half a year, before managing to find the time to fill in a form to send to her GP to request further information.

I was also informed by Atos that one of the reasons for the backlog was that the company is understaffed. I asked whether this was due to recruiting problems caused by people not wanting to work for Atos, and I was quite surprised when the response was 'yes'".

Roger has therefore written to Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, to ask whether his Department was aware that that Atos' poor reputation is making recruitment difficult, and consequently worsening backlogs in processing benefit applications.

Said Roger: "If DWP is aware of this problem, it seems extremely inappropriate that Atos is being permitted to keep these contracts, when its own incompetence and reputation for being grossly uncaring has made it so difficult for it to recruit staff that the result is devastating delays. If the Department was not aware of it, the question then arises of how such a basic problem could have escaped ministers' attention. It beggars belief that DWP are permitting assessments for the most vulnerable people in society to be handled by a company which is so publicly loathed that it cannot recruit sufficient staff to carry out its work."

## Roger condemns plans to allow fracking under people's homes without their consent

Roger tabled an Early Day Motion to protest against plans to allow energy companies to drill for gas under people's homes without their consent.

The EDM criticises this attempt to prioritise the interests of big business over the rights of ordinary

citizens and protecting the environment. Roger commented: "This consultation was opened on a day when Parliament and the UK media were occupied with the recent election results, and I am concerned that this was an attempt to evade proper public scrutiny."

Public opposition to these plans is estimated at 74 per cent in polls, and the Government lacks a popular mandate to institute this change. The effects of fracking can include climate change, water, soil and air contamination, loss of protected habitats, and lower house prices in areas where fracking takes place.

Said Roger: "Instead of trying to extract every last drop of polluting fossil fuels from the ground at the cost of the UK's natural environment, we need to invest in genuinely sustainable technologies such as wind, wave and solar power."

After Parliament's summer recess started, the Government also announced plans to make it possible to frack for gas in 10 of the UK's 13 national parks. These plans were introduced without proper public scrutiny or the chance for MPs to vote on them. "This is a very worrying development", commented Roger. "It is unbelievable that the Government are even entertaining the possibility of opening up the UK's most treasured and important natural areas to drilling. It is also outrageous that they are trying to rush these proposals through without opening them up for discussion first."



Farmland would also be at risk if fracking were to go ahead, with serious implications for the food chain and human health. Water used for fracking has hundreds of chemicals in it, of which 25% are linked with cancer or mutations, 40% to 50% affect the kidneys and the

nervous, immune and cardiovascular systems, and 75% affect sensory organs, the respiratory system and the stomach.<sup>1</sup>



It is not the case that these liquids would be stored safely and would have no impact on human health. 60% of fracking wells leak over a 30-year period, and between 30% and 70% of spent fracking fluid is not recovered. The potential for fracking to cause health problems in humans is therefore considerable.

### Don't outsource children's services, Roger tells Michael Gove

Roger wrote to the then-Education Minister Michael Gove to protest again plans to outsource vital public services which are responsible for children's safety. He was particularly concerned about the prospect that extremely vulnerable children would be left to the mercies of companies such as G4S and Serco, which have track records of appalling ineptitude.

Roger wrote: "I believe that caring for this country's most vulnerable children is far too important to leave to companies whose primary concern is making a profit, not child protection. Protecting children from maltreatment is the responsibility of the state. The wellbeing of our children should not be sacrificed to a free-market experiment in outsourcing. If you are anxious to improve children's services, I suggest you address the issues of inadequate funding and poor

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thenation.com/article/171504/fracking-our-food-supply#>

support for social workers. Neither of these problems will be fixed by funnelling yet more of taxpayers' money into the already well-lined pockets of incompetent, greedy companies."

He continued: "Fortunately, following the mass public outcry that greeted these proposals, the Government backtracked and decided to outsource children's services only to not-for-profit organisations, such as charities."



This House observes that this case sets a worrying precedent and creates a disincentive for creditors to negotiate rather than demanding full payment; further notes that vulture funds have made sizeable donations to the Republican party and that Republican judges form a majority on the Supreme Court; expresses support for the people of Argentina, who should not be penalised in order to make hedge fund owners even more obscenely wealthy; supports the Argentinian government in prioritising the country's financial wellbeing over paying vulture funds.

### Campaigning against vulture funds

Roger has tabled an Early Day Motion protesting the recent US Supreme Court ruling in favour of vulture funds. It reads:

That this House notes with concern the US Supreme Court's rejection of an appeal by Argentina against a ruling that it must repay in full creditors who purchased Argentinian debt at a discount on the secondary market, with the intention of extorting full payment; disagrees with the Court's decision to prioritise the greed of vulture funds over the Argentinian people's sovereignty and the country's ability to repay its legitimate creditors.



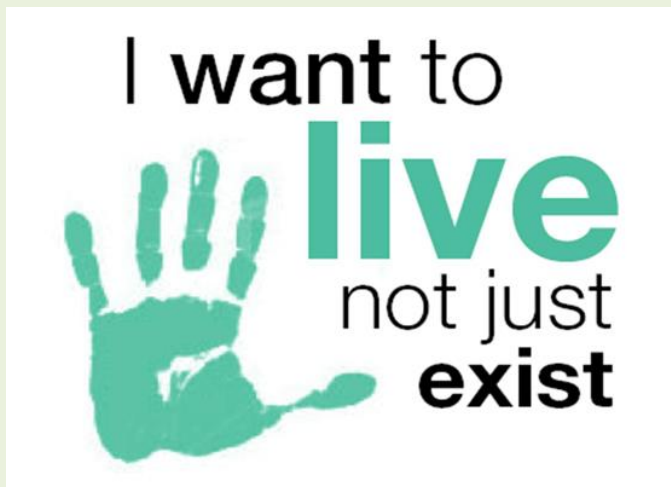
This House believes that it is unacceptable to purchase debt at the height of a debt crisis with the sole aim of profiting by suing the issuing country at the expense of its citizens; further expresses concern that if a similar case were to be heard in the UK courts, the same ruling in favour of vulture funds could be reached, unless the country concerned was one of the 40 covered by the Debt Relief Act 2010; and calls on the Government to bring forward the necessary legislative proposals to prevent this.

Commented Roger: "Why should the people of Argentina pay to make a small group of greedy billionaires even richer, at the expense of their country's finances and development?"

## Make work pay enough to live on, says Roger

Roger is supporting a campaign by the union GMB to raise the national minimum wage for its members to £10 per hour. He commented: "In one of the world's richest countries, it is shameful that people can work full time and yet still live in poverty or have to rely on benefits to provide for their families. With more people in poverty now in work than out of it, it is clear that the current minimum wage is too low to provide a decent standard of living."

Birmingham is one of the ten areas in the country with the lowest average income, at just £12,793 per person each year.



Roger tabled a Written Parliamentary Question to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to ask the Government to carry out a cost-benefit assessment of the impact of lifting the minimum wage to £10 per hour. He also wrote to the Low Pay Commission, to urge them to look into this.

He commented: "I doubt that the Government will bother to assess this. However, allowing employers to pay poverty wages benefits shareholders and CEOs at the expense of ordinary working people and, of course, the taxpayer. Why should wealthy corporations

continue to have their wage bill subsidised by the Government while the people who made them rich live in poverty?"



Recent research by the [Poverty and Social Exclusion in the United Kingdom project](#) found that over the last 30 years the number of households below the minimum standard of living has more than doubled, from 14 per cent to 33 percent, even though the economy doubled in size over the same time period. The study also found that one in every six adults in paid work is poor, while around 1.5 million children live in households which cannot afford to heat their home.

## Green tax cut gobbled up by greedy energy companies

Roger has criticised energy companies who have failed to pass on a green tax cut which was supposed to ease the pressure of bills on consumers. The £50 cut in a tax which was meant to support investment in renewable energy was instead gobbled up by greedy energy companies to add to their already massive profits.

## Are you paying top-up fees for care that should be covered by the council?

Research by the charity Independent Age found that people whose relatives are care home residents have been asked to pay "top-up" fees for essential care, when this is the responsibility of the local authority. While the rules allow families voluntarily to pay extra to provide more expensive accommodation for their loved

ones, they should not be asked to pay top-ups for essential services.



Councils are legally required to ensure that relatives only pay top-ups to upgrade their relative's care, and then only if they are financially able to do so. Birmingham City Council has no information on top-ups in the city, and is therefore not complying with guidance to ensure that relatives are happy to pay extra and can afford to do so.

Said Roger: "Birmingham City Council suffered extremely severe cuts in its funding from central Government, but it still has a legal requirement to provide essential residential care to those who need it."

### Congratulations to Councillor Claire Spencer



Roger at the count where Claire Spencer (fourth from left) was elected as a Councillor for Moseley and Kings Heath ward

### Death of West Midlands Police Commissioner Bob Jones

Speaking after the sad news that Bob Jones had died, Roger said, "I was shocked to hear that Bob Jones had died at what is nowadays still a young age of 59.



"I did not know Bob well but I did have dealings with him, both during his election campaign and afterwards as Police Commissioner. I always found him both engaging and responsive, particularly when I was trying to get the Home Office to set up a 'restorative justice' scheme in Sparkbrook in conjunction with local police.

"Bob was a very honest and straightforward person who was not in favour of elected Police Commissioners – but as these have been imposed on the population he took the view that he would make the best of what he considered to be a 'bad decision' until such time as a new Government could get rid of them. Sadly Bob will not be around to see the end of Police Commissioners."

### Roger says "no" to emergency surveillance bill.

Roger refused to support the emergency surveillance bill which the Government rushed through Parliament at the end of July.

Said Roger: "The Government have been aware for a year that some of the existing surveillance measures were likely to be ruled invalid and this was confirmed by the European Court of Justice in April. Instead of bringing forward legislation which could be properly



debated by Parliament, the Government left it until a couple of days before Parliament ends for the summer recess to bring forward emergency legislation which has been passed by both Houses in a ridiculously short period of time!”



“I know only too well the difficulties which the police and security services have in monitoring, tracking and apprehending individuals and groups who are intent on undermining our tolerant society by conspiring to commit acts of terrorism, such as the plot by a gang of would-be suicide bombers at a house in my constituency in 2012. However, this legislation is an attempt by the authorities to ‘bounce’ Parliament into passing a snoopers charter which could be used to intrude into the lives of everybody in this country.”

“The police and security authorities should have the powers to search out and arrest individuals who want to destroy our society, but I am not convinced that rushed emergency legislation is necessary and I will not be supporting it.”

Roger added his name to an amendment on the Sunset Clause to the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Bill. The amendment was supported by some Labour MPs and by Liberty, English PEN, Article 19, Privacy International and others.

The amendment attempted to highlight the lack of democratic accountability during the process and to ensure a prompt review of the proposed extensions to the RIPA interception regime. However, unfortunately it failed and the Bill was passed.

## Campaign to unlock access to lifesaving breast cancer drugs supported by Roger

Roger is supporting the Breast Cancer Campaign ‘Unlock drugs’ campaign, which aims to draw attention to the barriers which prevent lifesaving, low-cost drugs from being routinely available.

The campaign is in support of a Private Members Bill to address a major issue which is currently preventing existing drugs from being licensed for new purposes, even when there is clear evidence of their effectiveness.

The campaign highlights that drugs which could be used to prevent breast cancer developing and potentially reduce the chances of it spreading are not routinely available for those who could benefit from them.



Roger said: “This is a really urgent issue and one that affects thousands of women in the UK each year. It is vital that these low-cost drugs become routinely available for patients who could benefit from them and I am therefore supporting Breast Cancer’s ‘Unlock drugs’ Campaign to take action for all those affected by breast cancer both locally and across the country. I hope that many others will take part in this important campaign to show their support.”

## Following Roger

You can also follow Roger on twitter at [@RogerGodsiff](https://twitter.com/RogerGodsiff) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/rogergodsiff](https://www.facebook.com/rogergodsiff)