# Questions arise over minister's attendance at lunch amid Gaza crisis



Questions have been raised in the House of Commons regarding the attendance of Hamish Falconer, the UK Government's Middle East minister, at a lunch event in London while he was reportedly meant to be in the Middle East "pushing for a peace deal". The inquiries arose after Falconer did not respond to an urgent question concerning Gaza tabled by Green Party MP Ellie Chowns on Tuesday.

Chowns, who represents North Herefordshire, highlighted discrepancies between Foreign Office minister Catherine West's assurance that Falconer was engaged in diplomatic efforts in the Middle East and photographs published later showing him at Ronnie Scott's jazz club in Soho during the same timeframe. West informed MPs that Falconer was unable to attend the urgent question in the Commons because he was "in the region pushing for a peace deal".

The timeline of events indicates that the urgent question took place at 12.39pm on Tuesday, with West addressing the queries raised about Israel's blockade of humanitarian aid to Gaza. She stated, “In fact, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln, is in the region pushing for a peace deal, hence my covering this brief today.”

However, an event hosted by the SME4Labour group occurred around the same period, with Mr Falconer appearing as a speaker at the lunch, which started around midday. Photographs of Falconer addressing the attendees were shared on the group's account on X (formerly Twitter) at 3.19pm, indicating that he was present at the event during the time he was supposedly in the Middle East.

In her point of order raised on Wednesday, Chowns questioned the accuracy of West's statement regarding Falconer's absence, suggesting that the parliamentary record should be amended if evidence reflected that Falconer was not in the Middle East as claimed. The Deputy Speaker, Judith Cummins, responded that while the chair does not oversee ministerial statements, Chowns had articulated her concerns on the record.

A Foreign Office spokesperson clarified that Falconer had landed in London from Ankara, Turkey, around 11.45am, shortly before West spoke in the House, and explained that he could not have attended the urgent question. Falconer's official social media engagement following the event reinforced his earlier commitments in Turkey, where he discussed the broader security issues related to Syria.

The situation has spurred criticism among MPs, with Shadow Foreign Secretary Priti Patel asserting that the incident was troubling. She framed the discrepancies as a potential attempt to mislead the Commons or an indication of poor oversight regarding ministerial actions. Both Chowns and Patel have affirmed the need for transparency in such significant matters as those regarding Gaza and are pressing for clarity to resolve the apparent contradictions in the minister's whereabouts.

Falconer’s office has not yet provided comments regarding the inquiries raised about his attendance at the lunch event while parliament was engaged in discussions pertinent to Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/politics-live-labour-growth-workers-rights-angela-rayner-keir-starmer-kemi-badenoch-pmqs-ukraine> - This article mentions a Labour Minister attending an event in London, which relates to the broader context of government ministers' activities and potential discrepancies in their reported whereabouts.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/catherine-west-middle-east-minister-mps-priti-patel-b2709629.html> - This article specifically addresses the controversy surrounding a government minister's attendance at a jazz club event while reportedly being in the Middle East, which aligns with the situation involving Hamish Falconer.
* <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/lord-levy-ive-been-screamed-at-over-things-the-government-has-done-on-israel/> - This article discusses the UK government's actions and statements regarding the Middle East, including the involvement of ministers like Hamish Falconer, which provides context for their diplomatic efforts.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard/commons/todays-commons-debates/read/uk-parliament-2023-02-01/> - Although not directly available, parliamentary records like this would typically document urgent questions and ministerial statements, such as those involving Ellie Chowns and Catherine West.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/ministers/under-secretary-of-state-for-the-middle-east-and-north-africa> - This page provides information on the role and responsibilities of the Under-Secretary of State for the Middle East and North Africa, which is relevant to Hamish Falconer's position and duties.
* <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/ellie_chowns/north_herefordshire> - This page lists the activities and contributions of Green Party MP Ellie Chowns, including her involvement in raising urgent questions in Parliament, such as the one concerning Gaza.