

Political Affairs Brief

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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UK Parliamentary Questions

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 5 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 201W, on the Middle East: armed conflict, what steps are being taken to remove white phosphorus contamination from rubble in Gaza; how many sites have been found to be contaminated; what timetable is envisaged for decontamination; and what assessment has been made of the risk to public health arising from such contamination. [311486]

Mr. Michael Foster: Following the end of the conflict the UN Mine Action Team (UNMAT) carried out an unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance operation and any white phosphorus (WP) rounds that were found, whether leaking or intact, were removed and neutralised. During this initial phase UNMAT assisted in the destruction of over 100 WP rounds. UNMAT has also removed and neutralized 53 WP rounds found in further clearance operations carried out since July 2009.

Currently, the UN does not know of any contaminated sites where WP remains. However, there may be a residual risk in buildings and areas yet to be cleared. The removal of UXO and explosive remnants of war (ERW) from rubble and agricultural areas will continue until July 2010.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is unaware of any assessments of the risk to public health arising from WP contamination. However, UNMAT notes that exposed WP normally burns immediately, leaving remnants which pose a limited risk. Unexposed WP is safe until it is discovered or exposed to air. If WP is exposed during clearance, UNMAT is ready to deal with the situation immediately.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 5 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 256W, on the Middle East: armed conflict, what arrangements his Department has made to meet the housing needs of the 60,000 families identified as being in need; and if he will make a statement. [311487]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) supported the provision of basic shelter by the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. The Prime Minister, other UK Ministers and officials have repeatedly pressed the Government of Israel to permit the import of materials for the reconstruction of homes and other buildings.

We are pleased that Israel has now allowed some glass to enter, but we will continue to advocate on this issue. We are also following with interest the UNRWA pilot project to build three houses using locally-manufactured compressed earth bricks, made from locally sourced materials such as sub-soil and aggregates.

<http://services.parliament.uk/hansard/Commons/bydate/20100121/writtenanswers/part019.html#heading004>

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions a Minister from his Department has visited Gaza to assess the humanitarian situation since the conflict in Gaza began; and if he will make a statement. [311397]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Secretary of State for International Development visited Gaza on 1 March 2009. He was accompanied by John Ging, the UN Relief and Works Agency's Director for Gaza. The Secretary of State saw for himself the level of destruction in Gaza and met with people affected by the conflict. He also discussed relief efforts with the representatives of UK Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Officials from the Department for International Development regularly visit Gaza to assess the humanitarian situation and keep in close contact with NGOs and United Nations agencies. The Secretary of State receives regular briefings regarding the situation on the ground.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans the Government has to raise the restrictions placed by the government of Israel on access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials into Gaza at the UN Security Council; and if he will make a statement. [311400]

Mr. Michael Foster: The UK consistently presses the Government of Israel to ease border restrictions and permit the flow of humanitarian aid and reconstruction material into Gaza. The Secretary of State for International Development raised this issue in a telephone call with the Israeli Defence Minister in December. The UK has also raised the need for improved access in several international fora, including the UN Security Council on 17 December 2009.

We shall continue to take all appropriate opportunities to press for improved access into Gaza, full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 and full respect of international humanitarian law.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what Government policy is on the legality under international law of Israeli restrictions on the access into Gaza of humanitarian aid. [311401]

Mr. Michael Foster: Although there is no permanent physical Israeli presence in Gaza, given the significant control that Israel has over Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters, Israel retains obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as an occupying power. These include an obligation to facilitate the transfer of humanitarian aid into Gaza. We are extremely concerned by the continued restrictions on materials entering Gaza and will continue to press the Israeli Government to ease their restrictions.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks, of 5 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 255W, on Palestinians: overseas aid, what assessment he has made of the extent to which the decision of the government of Israel to link aid and reconstruction materials access to Hamas's refusal to renounce violence constitutes collective punishment of the people of Gaza; and if he will make a statement. [311581]

Mr. Michael Foster: We have serious concerns about the Israeli restrictions on Gaza and the impact they have on the lives of Gazans. Although there is no permanent physical Israeli presence in Gaza, given the significant control that Israel has over Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters, Israel retains obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as an occupying power. The Fourth Geneva Convention is clear that an occupying power must co-operate in allowing the passage and distribution of relief consignments. The restrictions currently imposed on the passage of relief supplies are, as we see it, a disproportionate response to the security threat.

The extent of Israeli restrictions, and the threat to Israel from militants in Gaza, varies constantly. Rather than focus on whether the restrictions at any given time, amount to collective punishment, we have consistently pressed the Israeli

Government to comply with their obligations under international law and allow passage of relief supplies. Although aid is entering Gaza, according to the United Nations this is insufficient to meet the needs of the Gazan people.

<http://services.parliament.uk/hansard/Commons/bydate/20100121/writtenanswers/part019.html#heading005>

Palestinians: International Assistance

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise the restrictions placed by the government of Israel on access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials into Gaza at the next discussion of the Middle East Quartet; and if he will make a statement. [311399]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have consistently pressed the Government of Israel to ease border restrictions and permit the passage of humanitarian aid and essential reconstruction material into Gaza. The EU as a whole has made similar calls, including in the Conclusions of the December Foreign Affairs Council and the Quartet has called for Israel “to allow for the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza”. We will continue to raise this issue at the highest levels.

<http://services.parliament.uk/hansard/Commons/bydate/20100121/writtenanswers/part022.html#heading013>

Palestinians: Politics and Government

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions a Minister from his Department has visited Gaza to assess the (a) human rights and (b) political situation there since the conflict in Gaza began; and if he will make a statement. [311398]

Mr. Michael Foster: I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State for International Development visited Gaza on 1 March 2009. During his visit to the region he met with Israeli officials and discussed issues around access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials. Officials for the Department for International Development (DFID) visit Gaza frequently, and meet with other organisations and agencies who work in Gaza. The Secretary of State is kept up-to-date with all aspects of the situation in Gaza including human rights and the political environment.

<http://services.parliament.uk/hansard/Commons/bydate/20100121/writtenanswers/part022.html#heading014>

United Nations

Ban urges Israel to end settlements, other obstacles to peace with Palestinians

Israel's settlement construction on occupied Palestinian territory, its annexation of East Jerusalem which remains part of that territory, and its blockade of Gaza are hindering Middle East peace efforts, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned today, calling for the resumption of long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. ... “It bears repeating that the international community does not recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the occupied Palestinian territory,” he said. “A way must be found, through negotiations, for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all.”

Turning to Gaza, he noted that one year after the end of Israel's three-week military offensive against Hamas, neither the issues that led to the conflict nor its aftermath have been fully addressed. Moreover, accountability for violations of international human rights law has not been adequately addressed, as called for by an independent UN mission that found that both Israeli forces and Palestinian militants may have committed serious war crimes.

"I call on Israel and the relevant Palestinian authorities to conduct, without delay, credible domestic investigations into the many reported allegations of serious human rights violations," Mr. Ban said. ...

"I repeat my call on Israel to end its unacceptable and counterproductive blockade and to fully respect international law," he added. "I am also greatly concerned about those in southern Israel who have to live in fear of continuing Palestinian rocket and mortar fire from Gaza. I call for a complete end to violence and the targeting of Israeli civilians." Israel cited the rocket attacks as the reason for its assault on Gaza.

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=33547&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

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Relevant Legislation ** New or updated

UK Parliament

**** Children, Schools and Families Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/childrenschoolsandfamilies.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/008/amend/pbc008210110a.97-100.html>

Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/constitutionalreformandgovernance.html>

**** Crime and Security Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/crimeandsecurity.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/003/amend/pbc003210110a.3-9.html>

**** Equality Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/equality.html>

Fourth marshalled list of amendments to be moved in Committee

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldbills/020/amend/ml020-iv.htm>

**** Flood and Water Management Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/floodandwatermanagement.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/009/amend/pbc0092101a.417-421.html>

Bill as amended in Public Bill Committee

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/053/2010053.pdf>

Scottish Parliament

End of Life Assistance Bill

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/38-EndLifeAssist/index.htm>

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Consultations

** new or updated

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Implementation: Consultation on Significant Draft Secondary Legislation, Guidance and Regulatory Impact Assessment (Scotland only) (closes 2 February 2009)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/children-families/pvglegislation/Consultation09>

Communities and Local Government: Creating a Single Equality Scheme for 2010 – 2013 (closes 28 February 2010)

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/987402.pdf>

Proposal to amend the Licensing Act 2003 to simplify the procedures for Licensing Statements; Interim Authority Notices; and Temporary Event Notices (closes 9 February 2010)

http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/consultations/6498.aspx

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