

Political Affairs Brief

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Foreign Secretary statement on the interception of the ship, the Rachel Corrie

I am glad that the interception of the Rachel Corrie has been resolved peacefully

As I set out in the House of Commons last week, we want to see a full, credible, impartial and independent investigation into the events surrounding last week's interception of the Gaza flotilla, which resulted in the tragic deaths of nine people. We continue to stress to the Israeli government the importance of an investigation that ensures accountability and commands the confidence of the international community, and includes international participation. We urgently need to see unfettered access to Gaza to meet the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza and to enable the reconstruction of homes, livelihoods and trade. That is why we continue to press the Government of Israel to lift Gaza's closure. I am also discussing these issues urgently with our international partners - including during my visits to European capitals in the next few days."

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=22331388>

Department for International Development

UK gives £19 million for Gazan refugees

The UK Government is to provide £19m to help support schools and health clinics for Gazan refugees, International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell announced today. The aid will go to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and will provide health care, education and services to meet the basic needs of Palestinian refugees in Gaza and the surrounding region. ...

Andrew Mitchell said: "The humanitarian situation in Gaza is both unacceptable and unsustainable. The UK is committed to helping those people affected by this crisis and that is why I am today providing £19 million to help meet their most basic needs. There is an immediate need for unfettered access to Gaza if the humanitarian situation is to be improved, to allow the economy to get back on its feet, and to give the young people of Gaza the prospect of a better future. I call on the Government of Israel to open the crossings to help end this humanitarian crisis." ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Media-Room/Press-releases/2010/UK-gives-19-million-for-Gazan-refugees/>

Northern Ireland Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was recalled on Friday in order to hold a special debate on Gaza

Gaza

Mr McHugh: I beg to move That this Assembly, conscious of the presence of Nobel laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire on board the MV Rachel Corrie, calls on Israel to conform with international human rights norms and joins with the British and Irish Governments in condemning the disproportionate actions by Israel earlier this week; recognises that every nation has the right to defend itself but that each nation also has a responsibility to respect and comply with international law; and further calls on Israel to ensure that humanitarian efforts in Gaza are facilitated, that an immediate end to the blockade is effected and that the MV Rachel Corrie is given safe passage to Gaza.

... This is the first time that the House has met out of session since it debated the events of 11 September 2001. ... The plight of the Gazans remains of serious concern to the international community, as the widespread condemnation of Israeli actions has shown. It is right and proper that the Assembly adds its voice to those of the British and Irish Governments and the entire international community. ...

I know that some Members of the Assembly suggest that Israel conducted itself in a proper and correct fashion when dealing with the flotilla. However, I ask them to look around and see the level of condemnation that exists. ... A great many Israelis want peace, but the inconsiderate actions of the present Government, who are seemingly determined to pursue a path of confrontation, are making that prospect more distant. ... Resolving conflict through brute force alone is not a considered strategy, and, all too often, terrorism has been used as a smokescreen to allow the Government to act outside the normally and morally accepted boundaries of the law. ...

... The recent Gladstone report, ... specifically condemned the blockade of Gaza as a contravention of international law. That is not to ignore the activities of Hamas and the suppression and brutality to which that faction has subjected Gazans, but it underscores the point that a respected group of international jurists reached its own critical conclusions on the matter. ...

Mr Weir: I rise on a sad and disappointing day for the Northern Ireland Assembly. Many people will look at the reconvening of the Assembly for today's proceedings and ask what on earth is going on in Members' minds. What on earth is happening? I will return to that point.

Apart from the soldiers of destiny whom Gerry McHugh spoke about, there are three reasons why the debate is sad and disappointing. First, yet again, a motion has been brought to the House that ignores the complexities of the Middle East. Its biased philosophy is simply, "Let's kick Israel." I have no desire to give greater credibility to the debate by going into details. My party stated its position in the House on Tuesday. The DUP will certainly not jump on the bandwagon and kick Israel. It is noticeable that when Israeli schools are shelled or suicide bombers attack Israeli citizens, not a word is said about it. The debate, therefore, demonstrates that bias further.

Secondly, I must say that if people genuinely care about the Middle East, there is a much better way to show it than through what is, effectively, a debating-society exercise. If the motion is passed, it will not benefit a single Israeli or Palestinian. ... Given the problems in the Middle East, what we are doing is trite ...

... There are many grave issues facing the world. Will we have a meeting next week on the problems facing North Korea? Will we send a special team out to cap the well in the Gulf? Perhaps we will look at the problems in Zimbabwe? ... Are we to debate all the issues of the world? ...

Mr O'Dowd: ... The debate is not about the relationship between the Israeli Government and the Government of the Gaza Strip or the Palestinian Authority. ... Do the law and order sections of [the DUP and the other party opposite] party manifestos not apply

beyond Aughnacloy, Bessbrook or Larne harbour, or do they believe that citizens' international fundamental rights should be afforded the protection of the UN and other such institutions? ...

Mr Kennedy: ... this House is not the correct place to discuss issues of international relations. Initiating the mechanism of an emergency debate on that issue, therefore, in my view, borders on an abuse of an important instrument at the House's disposal. ... We all recognise that what happened this week was a tragedy. As I said on Tuesday, I support the calls for a UN independent investigation into the matter. Such an investigation can and will uncover the facts and the truth, a truth that may be very different from that which some people in this House and other places assume it to be. We must always remember that Israel has the right to defend itself and that there are those who are clearly intent on wiping the state of Israel and its people off the map. Extremism and hatred from any quarter make relations extremely difficult. ...

Mr McDevitt: ... [I] join with members of the Jewish community in this city during Holocaust memorial day to remember that many millions of people of that faith lost their lives at the hands of evil people. Those who lost their lives include the grandmother of Gerald Kaufman, a great Member of Parliament and a former Minister of the Crown, who in 2009, speaking in the House of Commons, said that his grandmother: "did not die to provide cover for Israeli soldiers murdering Palestinian grandmothers in Gaza." The current Israeli Government ruthlessly and cynically exploit the continuing guilt among Gentiles over the slaughter of Jews in the Holocaust as justification for their murder of Palestinians. The implication is that Jewish lives are precious, but the lives of Palestinians —

Mr Speaker: Order. ...

Mr McDevitt: ... Do we send a powerful signal — a signal that will ripple across the seas between us and the West Bank and Gaza — that it is through politics, the power of persuasion, the strength of argument and the opportunity to change societies for the better that institutions like this have been created for the people of this land? ...

Dr Farry: ... there is considerable support for the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination, particularly in the aftermath of the Six Day War of 1967 and the creation of the occupied territories. It is also important that we recognise Israel's right to exist as a state. It has had a siege mentality throughout its history. Sometimes its actions have been counterproductive, but, equally, Israel has often been vilified, isolated internationally and pushed into a corner. ...

Mr McCartney: ... what happened in Belsen and what Mr Robinson experienced should not be used to underwrite Israel's total disregard for international law and basic human rights. People are being denied the right to import bricks and mortar to build hospitals; that is what the Israeli Government are doing. Using the holocaust to justify Israel's disregard of human rights is missing the point. ... Israel's total disregard led people to do what they did. ... The symbolism of people trying to break the blockade by land and, recently, by sea has the same effect as seeing the people who stood against apartheid. ... What has happened in the state of Israel, particularly in Gaza and less so in the West Bank, is apartheid, at this time in particular. ...

Mr A Maginness: ... I have no time for those who support Hamas because it has established its own dictatorship in that part of Palestine. ... I regard myself as a friend of the Palestinian people. I also regard myself as a friend of the Israeli people ...

Ms J McCann ... There are 80,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, 390 of whom are children as young as 13. The older ones who have been in a while have not seen their parents or other family members for four or five years, simply because the Israeli authorities have an illegal blockade and will not let the people in and out. I visited the West Bank and Jerusalem last year. I witnessed at first hand Jewish settlers putting Palestinian families, including young children, out on the streets to live in tents...

Mr McHugh: ... in this instance, the Israelis probably did not expect that world opinion would be against them or that their actions would generate so much bad press. That

reaction has had a great effect on them. ... Although there are entrenched positions on both sides, the Israelis are in the position of power. It would, therefore, be easier for them to show greater willingness to change their attitude than has been the case so far. The widespread coverage of the situation will bring home that point to them. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2009/100604.htm>

Petition of Concern: Safe Passage to Gaza for the MV Rachel Corrie

That this Assembly, conscious of the presence of Nobel laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire on board the MV Rachel Corrie, calls on Israel to conform with international human rights norms and joins with the British and Irish Governments in condemning the disproportionate actions by Israel earlier this week; recognises that every nation has the right to defend itself but that each nation also has a responsibility to respect and comply with international law; and further calls on Israel to ensure that humanitarian efforts in Gaza are facilitated, that an immediate end to the blockade is effected and that the MV Rachel Corrie is given safe passage to Gaza. — [Mr McHugh.]

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that a valid petition of concern was presented on Friday 4 June ... Under Standing Order 28, the vote could not be taken until at least one day had passed. The vote will, therefore, be taken as the first item of business today. ...

The Assembly divided: Ayes 40; Noes 40.

The vote was followed by a brief debate as to whether it had been appropriate for the Assembly to be recalled in order to debate the situation in Gaza

To read the full transcript see

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2009/100607today.htm#a>

United Nations

Gaza flotilla raid the focus of talks between UN and Lebanese official

The deadly Israeli military interception of an aid convoy bound for the Gaza Strip topped talks today between the top United Nations envoy to Lebanon and the country's defence minister. ... Mr. Williams reiterated Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's condemnation of the acts that led to the deaths and the Special Coordinator stressed that the root cause of the deadly incident was the three-year blockade of Gaza. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=34923&Cr=leban&Cr1=>

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Relevant Legislation ** New or updated

Scottish Parliament

End of Life Assistance Bill

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

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Other Relevant Information

National Counter Terrorism Security Office

Counter Terrorism Protective Security Advice for Places of Worship

<http://www.nactso.gov.uk/documents/CT%20Advice%20Places%20Of%20Worship.pdf>

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Consultations

** new or updated

**** closes in 4 days**

ACPOS Draft Hate Crime Guidance Manual (closes 11 June 2010)

http://www.scojec.org/consultations/current/10vi_acpos_draft_hate_crime_manual.doc

**** closes in 8 days**

Revised Guidance on Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education (England and Wales only) (closes 15 June 2010)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationid=1671&external=no&menu=1>

Continuing need for a controlled activity category in the Vetting and Barring Scheme (England and Wales only) (closes 17 June 2010)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationid=1710&external=no&menu=1>

Reform of the coroner system (closes 1 July 2010)

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/reform-coroner-system.htm>

Amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 (closes 15 July 2010)

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2010-pathogens-toxins/consultation-paper2835.pdf?view=Binary>

Welsh Assembly Review of Standing Orders (closes 16 July 2010)

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-bc-home/bus-committees-third-bc-comm/bc3_inq_so.htm

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