

# Political Affairs Brief

*A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community*

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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## Home Affairs

### UK Parliamentary Question

#### Free Schools

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidance he has issued to officials in his Department on the processing of new applications to open free schools in cases in which the applicant is a religious or faith-based group; and if he will make a statement. [22451]

**Mr Gibb** [*holding answer 8 November 2010*]: No guidance has been issued to officials relating specifically to processing free school applications from religious or faith-based groups. The Department will conduct due diligence checks on all groups and individuals affiliated with a free school proposal, to ensure that they are suitable to conduct a publicly funded school. These checks apply equally to applicants from religious or faith-based groups and to others.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101213/text/101213w0005.htm#1012145000012>

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## Israel

### UK Parliament Questions

#### Israel: Fires

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of casualties in the forest fire in Haifa and the Carmel Forest, Israel; whether any British casualties have been recorded; and if he will make a statement. [29839]

**Alistair Burt:** We were in close touch with Israeli authorities following the outbreak of this fire. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a statement on 3 December underlining that our thoughts were with all those who had lost family members or had had to leave their homes due to the blaze. As of 5 December the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre report that the fires had claimed 42 lives. None of these are reported as British nationals. The UK through the Royal Air Force deployed two helicopters from Cyprus to assist with the international effort to put out the fires. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also spoke to the Israeli Prime Minister on 3 December to underline our support.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101213/text/101213w0002.htm#10121333000021>

## Gaza

**Lord Fowler:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to alleviate the hardships suffered by people living in Gaza.

**Baroness Verma:** The UK has provided £27 million to the UN Relief and Works Agency this year, of which 30 per cent has been spent in Gaza to deliver essential services to the 70 per cent of Gazans who are refugees. We are also providing £2 million to support the Gazan private sector and funding UN and Palestinian Authority teams working to facilitate access for imports to Gaza. We continue to call on Israel to improve access to Gaza for aid and reconstruction materials.

**Lord Fowler:** ... As she will know, last month I made a visit to Gaza, the details of which are declared in the register of interests. Is it not part of the tragedy of Gaza that, although some goods are now going in more freely, severe restrictions remain on the import of construction materials that are necessary to build and rebuild homes and schools? While no one disputes the security problem, do not the Government agree that there is a danger that such a policy of restriction, which harms thousands of entirely innocent people, will help to recruit a new generation of extremists?

**Baroness Verma:** ... We recognise that ordinary Gazans are suffering-indeed, the deterioration of Gaza's institutions and infrastructure is described by the UN as "de-development". We continue to call on Israel to implement its 20 June announcement by allowing full exports and movement of people. Ministers have put that to Israel during their recent visits to the region and we are working with our EU partners to agree practical steps to improve access. That is having results, as Israel has agreed to limited exports from early next year. However, it is important that that translates into reality on the ground.

**Lord Turnberg:** My Lords, is the Minister aware that despite the antagonisms between Hamas and Israel, almost 40 per cent of children sitting down with their families in Israeli hospitals are from Gaza? Is she also aware that a number of doctors from Gaza are training in Israel to go back to set up clinics there?

**Baroness Verma:** The noble Lord makes a very valid point. Of course, it is by dialogue and improvement in negotiating across both the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel that we will improve the lot for both sides of the argument.

**The Lord Bishop of Bristol:** My Lords, does the Minister agree with the recent interagency report, *Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade*, that there can be no just and durable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without an end to the isolation and collective punishment of the people in Gaza?

**Baroness Verma:** ... We know that the situation in Gaza is a tragedy, but we do not believe that isolation of Israel through means of economic sanctions or embargos is the right approach. We will continue to press Israel robustly to make the concrete changes needed to improve the lives and futures of the people of Gaza.

**Lord Chidgey:** My Lords, can my noble friend give the House an update on the progress of the talks between Israel and Turkey in Geneva in trying to resolve the crisis created by the killings of Turkish citizens attempting to break the Gaza blockade aboard the "Mavi Marmara"? What actions are our Government taking to try to help resolve the strained relationship between those two countries, particularly given the importance of the strategic relationship between those countries and our own interests in the wider scenario?

**Baroness Verma:** My Lords, I thank my noble friend for that question. All dialogue and all conversations are very welcome if they encourage peace.

**Baroness Deech:** My Lords, does the Minister agree that Gaza has other very severe sources of hardship, which include: the enforcement of morality rules against women; attacks on Christians; the bombing of Christian schools; the persecution of journalists; and the killing of political opponents? All of those are due to the enforcement of the regime by Hamas. Does she further agree that perhaps the person in Gaza who suffers most is that long-term captured prisoner, Gilad Shalit?

**Baroness Verma:** My Lords, the noble Baroness is absolutely right that all those actions are deplorable. We need to ensure that, through dialogue with both sides, we work towards a peaceful settlement.

**Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean:** My Lords, can the Minister tell us what action the Government are taking through discussions with the countries of the Arab League about what they are able to do in terms of humanitarian relief? I am thinking particularly of Egypt, which controls the Rafah crossing, and I wonder whether it is allowing any humanitarian aid into Gaza through that crossing.

**Baroness Verma:** My Lords, the noble Baroness raises important issues that we are continuously raising with the Egyptians, through both the Foreign Office and DfID.

**Baroness Morris of Bolton:** ... On a recent visit to a school in Gaza with my noble friend Lord Fowler, I was struck by the irony of the seven year-old boy singing the song he had learnt for us, "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands". Would my noble friend agree that education is vital in holding the line against extremism? Will she confirm that DfID does all that it can to support the UNRWA schools that do so much to bring balance to the lives of children in Gaza?

**Baroness Verma:** ... education will be key to solving many of the difficulties that both these nations face. Of course, through our aid programme, that is exactly what we are trying to do to ensure that the infrastructure projects are able to work as normally as possible under the very difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves.

**Lord Clinton-Davis:** My Lords, apart from the point raised by my noble friend, how is Hamas reacting to the present situation? In the Government's view, is it helpful or unhelpful?

**Baroness Verma:** My Lords, we have no dialogue with Hamas.

**Lord Phillips of Sudbury:** My Lords, ever since I came to this House in 1998, I have heard members of the Front Bench say that the Government are calling for Israel to do this, to desist from that and all the rest of it. Israel has been in a decades-long breach of international law not only on its pulverisation of Gaza but on its colonisation of the West Bank. When are we actually going to do anything?

**Baroness Verma:** My Lords, my noble friend knows that only through dialogue will we resolve matters. The UK is only one of many partners involved in making sure that peace is able to be brought forward.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101213-0001.htm#1012132000472>

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## Foreign Affairs

### UK Parliamentary Questions

#### **Slaughterhouses: New Zealand**

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has made representations to the government of New Zealand on the prohibition on the practice of shechita in New Zealand; what response was received; and if she will make a statement. [29798]

**Mr Paice:** No representations have been made to the Government of New Zealand on the prohibition on the practice of shechita in New Zealand. Decisions on such matters are for the New Zealand Government.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101213/text/101213w0003.htm#1012141000026>

## Lithuania: Anti-Semitism

**Mr MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the letter of 25 November 2010 sent by the UK and other ambassadors in Lithuania concerning the growing manifestations of anti-Semitism in Lithuania. [29665]

**Mr Lidington:** It has not been the practice of successive Governments to publish letters sent by diplomats in a confidential capacity. It is important for the effective conduct of international relations for diplomacy to be able to take place on a confidential basis where necessary.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101213/text/101213w0002.htm#10121333000024>

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## Relevant Legislation \*\* New or updated

### UK Parliament

#### **Daylight Saving Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/daylightsaving.html>

#### **\*\* Fixed Term Parliaments Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/fixedtermparliaments.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/119/amend/pbc1191312a.1271-1273.html>

#### **Identity Documents Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/identitydocuments.html>

#### **\*\* Localism Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/localism.html>

Bill as introduced: volume 1

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/126/11126part1.pdf>

Bill as introduced: volume 2

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/126/11126part2.pdf>

First Reading, House of Commons

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101213/debtext/101213-0002.htm#10121313000009>

#### **\*\* Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/parliamentaryvotingsystemandconstituencies.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldbills/026/amend/ml026-v.htm>

Committee Stage, House of Lords

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101213-0001.htm#1012132000477>

#### **Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/policereformandsocialresponsibility.html>

## Scottish Parliament

### Certification of Death Bill

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/58-CertDeath/index.htm>

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## Consultations

\*\* new or updated

**\*\* closes in 3 days**

### **Equality Act 2010 - Performance of the Public Sector Equality Duties in Wales**

(closes 17 December 2010)

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/equality/equalityact2010/?lang=en>

**\*\* closes in 3 days**

### **Prevent Review** (closes 17 December 2010)

<http://preventreview.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

### **Equality and Human Rights Commission: Draft Code of Practice on Further and Higher Education** (closes 31 December 2010)

[http://live.ehrc.precedenthost.co.uk/cgi-bin/generate.pl?page\\_id= sx0666i4b&save=screen](http://live.ehrc.precedenthost.co.uk/cgi-bin/generate.pl?page_id= sx0666i4b&save=screen)

### **Charity Commission for England and Wales: Views on Future Strategy**

(closes 14 January 2011)

[http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/RSS/News/pr\\_strategic\\_review.aspx](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/RSS/News/pr_strategic_review.aspx)

### **Improvements to Criminal Justice Statistics** (closing date 18 February 2011)

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/statistics-cp171110.htm>

### **National statistics, published by the Department of Health about the experience of black and minority ethnic patients** (closes 18 February 2011)

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH\\_121762](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_121762)

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