

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community
Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
SCoJeC

Contents

[Home Affairs](#)

[Holocaust](#)

[Israel](#)

[Foreign Affairs](#)

[Other Relevant Information](#)

[Relevant Legislation](#)

[Consultations](#)

Home Affairs

House of Commons Business

col 433 **The Leader of the House of Commons (David Lidington):** ... There is this sense with Gerald Kaufman's passing of another link being broken with a former political age. His first general election contest was in 1955, when he stood against Harold Macmillan himself in the Bromley constituency—I think without too much expectation of a shock victory on that occasion. Then, of course, he represented successive Manchester constituencies for many years.

This was a man who also served in No. 10 under Harold Wilson and who carried the memories of working alongside him and debating against—in those days through the columns of the press and in his speech-writing capacity, rather than as a Member of the House—his opponents in my party. He went on to serve as a Minister and, for many years, as a senior member of the shadow Cabinet during the Labour party's years in opposition.

I can certainly say from experience that Gerald's book "How to be a Minister" is still worth reading ... I do recall from my reading of Gerald's book the importance he gave to getting control of your diary and private office at the earliest possible date, and also his sage warning to Ministers to avoid, so far as they could, their numerous invitations to speak at banquets and formal dinners, which inevitably ended with the host denouncing the guest of honour in the most strident possible terms.

Gerald was perhaps most in his element as the Chair of first the Select Committee on National Heritage, and then the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. Even those of us who did not share Gerald's politics knew that he was a man who was passionately committed not only to his own political party and tradition, but to the importance of the arts and cultural values as something that mattered to people in all walks of life in all parts of the United Kingdom. While his interests and enthusiasm in the field of the arts ranged widely, it was perhaps cinema for which he had a particular affection. I do just wonder what we have missed in not being able to hear his comments on the Oscars debacle that took place earlier this week. I suspect that they would have been fairly forceful and waspish in tone.

We mourn Sir Gerald's passing and we shall miss him in this House. I am sure that everyone, on whichever side of the House they sit, would want to send their sympathy to his family and friends. ...

col 434 **Valerie Vaz:** ... As the Leader of the House said, Sir Gerald's great loves were ice cream and films. Apparently he went to see "Singin' in the Rain" 20 times in all the cinemas in Leeds when it first came out. He worked on "That Was the Week That Was", the forerunner of "Saturday Night Live", with the great broadcaster Alasdair Milne, the future director-general of the BBC. He was fearless in his support for justice internationally and for his constituents. His majority at the last election was 24,000, and that was down to his popularity and his care for his constituents. Today—World Book Day—he is remembered for his iconic book "How to be a Minister". Before I came into this place—before I met Sir Gerald—I bought that book as a present for my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) when he first became a Minister in the Blair Government. Many hon. Members here, as well as former Members who are now in the other place, have told me how they used that book as their bible.

We have some lovely anecdotes. The Clerk of the House reminded me that on your re-election, Mr Speaker, Sir Gerald was quite keen to get the whole process right, and he proceeded with avuncular dignity. I remember the day; it went off absolutely beautifully and you were re-elected. He loved marmalade, so on a Select Committee trip to the Isle of Mull, to cheer him up on his birthday—it was one of the big numbers—he was made orange marmalade ice cream. On a Committee visit to Rome, some Members had not been there before, so before he went to the ambassador's dinner, he took them to the Trevi fountain and, of course, to have some gelato. Another Member told me that when Sir Gerald was a Minister, he always gave a lift to Back Benchers in his ministerial car because he knew that one day he would be a Back Bencher. We talk about the greasy pole of politics. I think it is more like the luge, actually—you just get battered as you go down.

Sir Gerald dressed beautifully—I always used to watch him in the Tea Room—and that was probably a tribute to his father, who was a tailor. He was a close friend of Harold Wilson, another great Labour Prime Minister. He was loyal, clever and courageous, and he will be missed from this place. We send our condolences to his family and friends. ...

col 438 **Pete Wishart:** ... Hon. Members relied on Sir Gerald for advice and guidance, such was his experience. For many hon. Members, he was simply a style guru. I remember those long scarves he used to wear. One day he had to be rescued at the entrance to the tube station because a scarf had got caught, and I remember the great efforts that went into ensuring that Gerald was separated from his scarf. I send my condolences to his family and friends. ...

col 441 **Margaret Beckett:** ... I am sure the whole House shares my regret that the new Father of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), cannot be with us today. One of Sir Gerald's more gleeful tales was of how he had the forethought, when first elected to the House, to take the oath before the right hon. and learned Gentleman, in the belief that both were likely to be here for some considerable time and so be contenders for the post of Father of the House. He took great glee in telling that story. I would like to say that I think he probably would not have begrudged the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe his opportunity, but I am not absolutely certain about that, and I would not wish to do Gerald an injustice in any way. Certainly he was desperately anxious to become Father of the House and fully deserved to hold that office.

As everyone has said—and like others, I am pleased that some of his family can be here—he was witty, he was brave, he could be extremely acerbic, but he was a very skilled parliamentarian. I see that some of the obituaries have referred to his skill in Committee, and, as somebody who was a Whip when Gerald was a Minister, I can certainly testify to that. Gerald was a Minister of State trying to get a Bill through the House at a time when we did not really have a majority; people would be astonished about that period, and it might be worth their looking back at some of the *Hansards* of the time. We had a notional majority of maybe one or two, most of whom were too sick to be here at any time unless things were absolutely desperate. So in Committee things were

extremely tight, but Gerald was an absolutely brilliant Committee Minister. He flattered the Opposition shamefully and quite disgustingly; he covered them with compliments and praise while just not being able to quite see his way clear to accepting their brilliant amendments to the Government's proposed legislation.

As people have already said, he was also very good value as a confidante and adviser. I happened to be in Committee with Gerald on a day when we had a Government vacancy—it had been vacant for some little time. I was summoned to No. 10 and I had to say to the civil servant who made the call, "I can't possibly come. I'm the Whip on a Committee and we have not really got a majority. Don't be ridiculous, of course I can't come now. I will come at lunchtime." That gave me the opportunity to consult Gerald. I had only been a Member for just over a year and was unenthusiastic about the prospect that appeared to lie before me, and I said to Gerald, "Do you think I can ask for time to think about it?" He, like me, had guessed what the summons might mean and the first thing he said was, "Congratulations. That's fantastic. I'm thrilled." I said, "Yes, but hang on; can I ask for time to think about it?" He replied: "My dear Margaret, when the Prime Minister sends for you and offers you a post in the Government, you either say 'Yes, Prime Minister,' or you say 'No, Prime Minister.' You do not ask for time to think about it." Looking back I am stunned by how naive I was even to ask the question, but it was certainly very helpful advice.

Gerald was also an extremely kind man. As it happens, I have a close personal friend who worked with him in No. 10 and who always spoke about what hysterical and great company Gerald was, but also what a kind person he was. He was ... a ferocious advocate on behalf of his constituents. The Leader of the House should probably count himself lucky that he did not have the chance to hear Gerald's comments on the cases raised by my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House on people who were detained without notice. Gerald would have had a lot to say about that, and it would not have been very nice to hear. ...

col 442 Michael Fabricant: ... Those who did not know [Gerald Kaufman] saw him as being ferociously vitriolic, and he was in this Chamber. But outside he was a very different man. He had a waspish sense of humour. I had the privilege of joining him in 1993 on the National Heritage Select Committee. The Committee was excellent, the trips were so marvellous and he was such a brilliant Chairman that I stayed with him not only on the National Heritage Select Committee, but also, for two Parliaments, apart from a brief excursion to the Select Committee on Home Affairs, on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Gerald hated pomposity—that was one of his most admirable features—but he loved outrageous clothes, as hon. Members have already said. I used to go with him to the theatre and the cinema from time to time. His last recommendation to me was to see a brilliant movie called "Hail, Caesar!", which I duly saw and loved. It could sometimes be embarrassing to go somewhere with Gerald, because if the weather was cold, he would wear a red tea cosy on his head. When I mentioned this to him, he said it was not half as embarrassing as what I was wearing. *[Laughter.]*

Gerald also loved ice cream. I remember being on a Culture, Media and Sport Committee visit to Los Angeles and attending a meeting that was getting very boring. We were being addressed by a chap from the Foreign Office about something that had nothing to do with our inquiry, and Gerald got up and said, "Thank you very much for your speech." The Foreign Office official rather foolishly said, "But I haven't finished." In the way that only he could do, Gerald turned round slowly and said, "Oh yes you have." Then we toddled off to get our ice cream. Ice cream, musicals—which he could sing along to; he knew all the words—and Judy Garland were his great loves.

Gerald was a brilliant Chairman of the National Heritage Committee and the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. He was great fun. He was not party political. I am now going to lose the support of all my hon. Friends by saying that I often found myself defending the BBC, whereas Gerald wanted to abolish it. That was a strange

juxtaposition of roles.

He told me not long ago that the present Conservative party chairman—when he was a junior Whip back in 1993—had asked him to take me under his wing because I was rather wild and perhaps he could make me more like a conventional parliamentarian. You can see that that worked!

In short, Gerald was a wonderful man who brightened all our lives. He was a great friend, and he was nothing like the person that I think the public saw him as. He was self-deprecating, kindly and a great parliamentarian. I think we will all miss him. ...

col 444 David Amess: I join others in paying tribute to the late Sir Gerald Kaufman. I got the impression that Sir Gerald did not entirely approve of me, which is quite understandable. I was never sure whether that was because I was once the Member of Parliament for Basildon or whether it was down to my views on the state of Israel, but I can say without hesitation that he was a commanding figure in this House and a great orator and that I would not have wanted to get on the wrong side of him. ...

col 445 Barry Sheerman: ... the House would be packed if Gerald Kaufman was at the Dispatch Box. He was the funniest, most incisive and most brilliant debater I ever saw in this House. I have seen some very good debaters in this House, but Gerald in his prime was peerless. ...

No one ever wanted to cross Gerald about a film. I remember foolishly going into the Tea Room and being enthusiastic after seeing “Superman” for the first time. Gerald had also been to see it, and he gave a caustic review about everything that was wrong with American cinema at the time, with the plot and with the acting. He said, “But you liked it, Barry, so it couldn’t have been all bad.”

Gerald Kaufman has left a legacy. He did not have any children, but he has left a legacy both in this House, in the country and in his constituency. ...

Some people have talked about Gerald’s sense of style, and his wonderful suits pushed the boundaries in some ways. He remained faithful all his life to the same Leeds tailor and would specify the Huddersfield mill in which the cloth would be spun and woven. He was a man of great talent, great common sense and brilliant oratory. We owe him so much, not only as a party or as a House but as a country. ...

col 446 Jeff Smith: ... I particularly remember doing a Bollywood dance routine with [Gerald Kaufman] on an open-air stage in Longsight market a couple of years ago. I have to say, his dance moves showed up my own, even though he was well into his 80s at the time.

Whatever the event, what was quite remarkable was the admiration and extraordinarily high esteem in which Sir Gerald was held by his constituents. I genuinely do not think I have come across another MP who was so widely admired by their constituents. It was largely because he was such a fierce champion of their interests both in Parliament and in Manchester, but also because he was so assiduous in his dealings and communication with them. Residents often told me how they had written to Sir Gerald and received a hand-written reply. Sometimes, the replies would reflect his sharp tongue; a particular favourite of mine was: “I agree with your concerns on this issue. Unfortunately there’s no point in me writing to the chancellor because he’s useless and won’t listen to me.” ...

col 448 John Cryer: ... [Gerald Kaufman] often had views that seemed at odds with his public reputation. Although he was, in some ways, rebellious, he was actually a natural loyalist. Every Labour leader recognised that Gerald had very loyal qualities. If he had any criticisms of Tony Blair when he was Prime Minister, he never made them public. When he spoke to me, he would start any criticism with, “As you know, John, I bow to no man in my admiration of the Prime Minister.” Then he would go on to be acerbic about something that the Government had just done. He will be very, very deeply missed by many of us from all parts of the House.

col 451 Graham Stringer: ... My phone rang one morning and it was Gerald. He said — this is not one of the most acidic comments he made, but I think it epitomises him —

“Graham, do they employ human beings in the housing department?” He was very dissatisfied with the treatment of a family who were in severe housing difficulties.

What was more remarkable was that on that morning he was the centre of worldwide media attention because, as shadow Foreign Secretary, he was in charge of changing Labour’s policy from unilateralism to multilateralism. Yet he took time off in the middle of that media hubbub to take up cudgels on behalf of a family in his constituency who were in need. He was a ferocious tribune of the people of Manchester Ardwick, his first constituency, and Manchester Gorton.

Gerald loved this place. He intended to stay here as long as he did. When he started drawing his pension, there was a lot of interest from young Turks in his constituency, who rather fancied that they could do a better job of representing the people of Manchester Gorton. When they sidled up to him and asked, “Gerald, are you standing at the next general election?”, he would reply, “Yes—and the one after that.” That was always his reply, even until recently. ...

col 453 **David Winnick:** ... Gerald was born in 1930. If ever there was a person of Jewish origin who understood the horrors of what was to take place by the time he was 15, it was Gerald. He knew from the very beginning, when the stories came out and the statements were made in the House of Commons, how Jews were being slaughtered in their hundreds of thousands—in the end, 6 million—not because of their politics or anything else, but for no other reason than that they shared the same origin as Gerald, and indeed myself, for that matter. From early times, he was an ardent supporter of Israel. Before he was a Member of Parliament, during the 1967 war, I remember his eagerness that Israel should survive. His great fear, shared by many others who became critics, was that if it was otherwise, the Jewish population could be forced into the sea, as in the threats that were made at the time.

But later Gerald became a harsh critic of Israel, not because he ceased to be concerned about Jews—a false accusation that was made against him from time to time—but because he believed that the Israelis were showing a total lack of consideration for Palestinians, thought that they were treating Palestinians, in many instances, with contempt, and felt a strong urge to speak out in the way he did. In doing so, he antagonised a number of people in the Jewish community, but Gerald was not the sort of person who would feel intimidated because people did not like what he said. I happen to believe that he was right. One would expect me to say that, because I too have very strong feelings about the way in which Palestinians have been treated: the contempt for human rights and the fact that, as far as I can see, the Israeli authorities—the leading people—show no desire to bring about a sovereign, independent Palestine alongside Israel.

Gerald was not the easiest of people to get on with. I had my own rows with him occasionally, and then we made up and spoke about films. He was difficult in many instances, but how many people with such courage, determination and single-mindedness do we not find difficult when we assess their lives? He did good; he wanted to do good. He was dedicated to the Labour party and the Labour movement, and to this country. We shall miss him a great deal. ...

col 454 **Greg Mulholland:** ... [Gerald Kaufman was] the son of Jewish refugees who escaped pogroms in Poland. For the son of foreign refugees fleeing persecution to end up as Father of this House is not only an enormous tribute to him and his family but something that must surely send a very clear message today, in these troubled times. We should all reflect on it and be proud of his achievement. He was a great parliamentarian—a real defender of this Parliament. All of us who regard ourselves first and foremost as parliamentarians, ahead of our roles in Government and party, have certainly lost one of our own. ...

He had the courage to disagree with his own party leaders and colleagues. He had the courage to criticise journalists, as a former journalist. He had the courage, whatever people may feel about his views as a proud Jewish man, to speak out about the situation

in Israel and Palestine. The legacy of that is that we must reach the stage where we feel obliged not to take one side or the other, but to fight, as he did, for justice, peace and resolution. ...

col 457 **Chris Bryant:** ... People have referred to Sir Gerald's dress sense. It was recondite, I would say. I think he probably outlived his tailor from Leeds, because he certainly wore Etro from Milan all the time by the end. It was not enough to have a loud suit; he had to have a loud tie and a loud shirt, neither of which went with the other. It was a kind of act of defiance against people's eyesight. I remember that when he was cold in Las Vegas airport, he wanted to go and buy a jumper, so he went off with Claire Ward, and when he saw the Missoni store he went straight in. He and Claire could not decide between two jumpers, so they asked me for advice. I said, "Gerald, they're both absolutely hideous. You shouldn't buy either of them", so he bought both. ...

Gerald was also something of a fan of Bette Davis, and I am thinking of his last few years. Bette Davis once said: "Old age is no place for sissies", and I think Gerald would have agreed, because it was sometimes a travail for him to come to the House. He was quite frail, but when he had to represent his constituents he was absolutely determined to be here, and when there were issues he cared passionately about, he made sure he was here. I think the last year was tough for him. ...

col 460 **Kevin Brennan:** ... Sir Gerald was also politically brave. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) said that this was a controversial point to make at the end of his remarks, he was right to mention Gerald's position on the state of Israel and its treatment of the Palestinian people. It was extremely brave of him to raise those issues in the House in the way that he did, and it is to his eternal credit that he did so.

People have mentioned Gerald's dedication to his constituency. One morning about four years ago, I was having tea in the Tea Room ... when Gerald came in, dressed as usual in colourful fashion. My hon. Friend and I had a brief debate about exactly what colour his suit was, and indeed whether a word existed in the English language to describe such a colour. Gerald had a spring in his step and looked delighted. We wondered whether he had been to a musical the night before—he was whistling as he entered the Tea Room. Then the penny dropped. The Boundary Commission proposals had just been published and Manchester, Gorton was not to be dissected in any way. Sir Gerald was delighted that he could say, "Yes, I'll be standing at the next election, and the one after." ...

col 464 **Madeleine Moon:** In May 2005, I was in the Tea Room, and I was rather chuffed to be sitting near Sir Gerald Kaufman, listening to him talk. A Whip came in and said that the queue to take the Oath of Allegiance was short and that any new Member who wished to join it could do so, even though it was ahead of the days allocated. Gerald turned to me and said, "Go! One day, it might help you to be Father of the House." I slightly glazed over at the thought of how old I would have to be, how long I would have to totter on for, to be Father of the House, but I heard this voice say, "Go!", and I did. ...

col 467 Mr Speaker: ... I am sure people will understand if I say that, alongside being an outstanding and indefatigable Member of Parliament in his constituency, Gerald was quintessentially a House of Commons person. I think that on behalf of colleagues I can offer no greater tribute to Gerald than to say that.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-02/debates/2FD394E4-EFD4-43AC-BE40-6CF82F25A268/BusinessOfTheHouse>

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

Modern Languages/Biblical Hebrew

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): The Government are tomorrow publishing subject content for AS and A-levels in a range of languages with smaller cohorts. This fulfils the commitment made in 2015 to work with the exam boards to

ensure the continuation of these qualifications.

The reformed GCSE content for modern foreign languages, published in 2014, is suitable for all the modern languages which have been redeveloped as part of the GCSE review process. These are: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Polish, Panjabi, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. The exam boards have either already developed specifications for these GCSEs, or are currently doing so.

At A-level, we have worked with the exam boards to develop specific content for modern languages with smaller cohorts. These languages are named in the content as follows: Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, modern Greek, modern Hebrew, Japanese, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese, Polish, Turkish and Urdu.

The content for modern languages with smaller cohorts is largely identical to the reformed A-level (and AS) content which applies to French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Russian. This was developed by the independent A-Level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB), appointed by the Russell Group to meet the expectations of higher education, and was published in 2015.

This content for modern languages with smaller cohorts addresses the risks associated with examinations for smaller numbers of candidates, including the challenges of recruiting specialist examiners. The requirement to demonstrate speaking skills is not included in the content, which is consistent with current AS and A-level qualifications in the relevant languages—with the single exception of Urdu (in which speaking skills are currently examined). We have, however, included a clarification that specifications should encourage the development of speaking skills, although those skills will not be formally examined. To secure a level of rigour which is comparable for all modern languages, the Government are introducing a new requirement for modern languages with smaller cohorts. The proposed content requires students to apply language skills (reading, writing and listening) in combination, by responding to spoken and written sources addressing common subject matter.

The A-level (and AS) content for modern languages with smaller cohorts will apply to courses beginning in September 2018. The current specifications for these languages will remain available for courses beginning in September 2017.

The Government are also publishing tomorrow revisions to the ancient languages subject content, at both GCSE and AS/A-level. This was first published in 2014, to apply to all ancient languages. For Biblical Hebrew, however, it has become evident that certain aspects of that content could not apply directly, or would be inappropriate at this level of study. To clarify how particular requirements will apply to Biblical Hebrew, and whether any requirements will not apply, we have worked with independent subject experts and others with a close interest in the subject. The revised content maintains the overall level of demand of the content while ensuring clarity as to how certain requirements should be met in Biblical Hebrew specifications. [HCWS515]

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-02/debates/17030291000009/ModernLanguagesBiblicalHebrew>

[TOP](#)

Holocaust

House of Commons Written Answer

Victoria Tower Gardens

Edward Leigh [65029] To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, what proportion of Victoria Tower Gardens will be removed from the use of local residents on a (a) temporary and (b) permanent basis; and what assessment he

has made of the extent to which security issues are likely to cause disruption to the subsequent use of Victoria Tower Gardens by local residents.

Marcus Jones: The Government launched an international design competition for a new National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in September 2016 and this is still underway. A jury will select a winning design team in the coming months. The winning design team will work with Government in the months following to further develop their concept design, reflecting comments from technical experts and the general public. The competition brief is clear that the final design should improve the landscape qualities of Victoria Tower Gardens, while respecting and preserving the character and existing use of the Gardens as a public park, including for the use of local residents. The ten submitted designs include an underground learning centre.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-22/65029/>

[TOP](#)

[Israel](#)

House of Commons Written Answer

Iran: Israel

Jim Shannon [65418] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions the Government has had with Iran on its policy towards Israel.

Tobias Ellwood: The reopening of our Embassy in Tehran in August 2015, and the subsequent upgrade in the relationship to Ambassadorial level in September 2016, provides us with the ability to discuss regularly a range of issues with the Iranian government, including regional affairs and to address areas including Iran's policy towards Israel.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-23/65418/>

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

Foreign Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): ... Ministers will discuss developments on the middle east peace process (MEPP) and are likely to discuss obstacles to peace, including incitement, terrorism, demolitions and recent settlement announcements. [HCWS516]

To read the full statement see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-02/debates/17030291000012/ForeignAffairsCouncil>

Scottish Parliament Motion

S5M-04374.1 Ross Thomson: Israeli Apartheid Week – As an amendment to motion S5M-04374 in the name of John Finnie (Israeli Apartheid Week), leave out from "13th annual" to end and insert "International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism; commends the UK Government for adopting this definition; notes the letter written by Jo Johnson MP calling for events under the banner of Israel Apartheid

Week to be 'properly handled' to ensure that the country's values, expectations and laws are not violated; condemns without exception any acts of aggression towards Jewish businesses by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement; considers that there is no place in society for any form of discrimination or harassment, including anti-Semitism, and calls on the Scottish Government to both adopt the IHRA definition and robustly and vigilantly ensure that it pursues the elimination of anti-Semitism and all forms of harassment, racism or prejudice."

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-04374.1>

The Motion to which the above is an amendment was included in yesterday's issue of PAD and can be read at

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-04374>

United Nations

UN envoy condemns firing of rocket from Gaza towards Israel

Condemning a rocket fired from Gaza towards Israel, a senior United Nations envoy has called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid escalation of the situation.

"Such provocations seek only to undermine peace," said Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in a statement today.

According to the statement, the rocket fired yesterday was third such incident in the past 30 days after a period of almost four months of quiet.

"I call on all responsible parties to exercise maximum restraint, avoid escalation and prevent incidents that jeopardize the lives of Palestinians and Israelis," urged Mr. Mladenov.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56272#.WLIuiRJ96nY>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN rights experts denounce Israel's growing constraints on human rights defenders

... The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Michel Forst, say human rights defenders in the region have been facing escalating restrictions by Israel on their activities.

"We are deeply concerned by the latest constraints on the invaluable work being done by human rights activists – Palestinian, Israeli and international – who investigate, research, advocate and peacefully mobilize with respect to human rights concerns in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," they said.

"Israel has an obligation under international law to protect human rights defenders and promote their work," said the two Special Rapporteurs. "The activities of such people are crucial to ensuring meaningful protection of those individuals and communities whose fundamental rights are threatened. However, it appears that Israel's latest actions are instead targeting these activists and undermining their efforts to defend others."

The Special Rapporteurs were concerned about three developments in recent days; firstly, the dispersal of a protest on 24 February by the Israeli military using tear gas, sound bombs and rubber bullets; the peaceful protest, organized annually by a number of human rights organizations, brings together Palestinians and Israelis. The demonstrators call for the re-opening of Shuhada Street, the former commercial center of Hebron, which has been closed to Palestinians since an Israeli settler carried out a shooting at the Ibrahimi Mosque in 1994, killing 29 Palestinian worshippers.

The Rapporteurs also expressed concern about a bill introduced in the Israeli Knesset

which, if passed, would require all Israeli non-governmental organizations receiving more than half of their funding from foreign public sources to pay fees associated with requests filed under the country's Freedom of Information Act. The bill, which would primarily affect human rights organizations, is the latest legislation debated or enacted by the Knesset that specifically targets Israeli human rights defenders and is designed to obstruct advocacy and activism. ...

Lastly, the Rapporteurs criticized the Israeli Government's decision to deny a work visa application submitted by one of the investigators of Human Rights Watch, an organization which has worked in Israel for almost three decades. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21279&LangID=E>

[TOP](#)

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Religious Hatred

Justin Tomlinson [65122] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle faith-based persecution in countries with a high level of such persecution.

Tobias Ellwood: This Government remains firmly committed to the promotion and protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief in all countries. Through our bilateral work we lobby host governments to raise individual cases and highlight practices and laws that discriminate against people on the basis of their religion or belief. For example, the Foreign Secretary, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Mr Johnson) raised the rights of all Pakistani citizens, including religious minorities, during his visit to Pakistan in November 2016. Multilaterally, we work to sustain consensus on the adoption and implementation of two important Resolutions: the European Union's resolution on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)'s resolution on Combating Religious Intolerance. We also support a number of projects through the FCO's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights. For example, we support a network of human rights defenders in South Asia working on this priority. In October 2016 the FCO hosted a groundbreaking international conference to draw attention to the importance of freedom of religion or belief to global efforts to counter violent extremism.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-22/65122/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Religious Freedom

Lord Oates [HL5463] To ask Her Majesty's Government how many Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff are employed in overseas countries who are dedicated to advancing freedom of religion or belief.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: Ambassadors and High Commissioners, supported by their diplomatic staff, are expected to promote, protect and integrate human rights, including freedom of religion or belief throughout their work.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-02-20/HL5463/>

Developing Countries: Religious Freedom

Lord Alton of Liverpool [HL5497] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the link between the protection of religious minority groups and alleviating global poverty.

Lord Bates: A commitment to human rights underpins the four strategic objectives of the Government's UK Aid Strategy, which include tackling extreme poverty and helping the world's most vulnerable. Freedom of belief is one of a range of human rights that DFID considers through its Partnership Principles Assessments when providing financial support to governments.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-02-21/HL5497/>

[TOP](#)

Other Relevant Information

Hope Not Hate

2017 State of Hate Report

<http://edition.pagesuite-professional.co.uk//launch.aspx?eid=3a775a92-2424-4e47-8166-4b6d6b344fd5>

[TOP](#)

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/arbitrationandmediationservicesequality.html>

Assisted Dying Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/assisteddying.html>

Lobbying (Transparency) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/lobbyingtransparency.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

Promotion of Israeli-Palestinian Peace (United Kingdom Participation)

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/promotionofisraelipalestinianpeaceunitedkingdomparticipation.html>

[TOP](#)

Consultations ** new or updated today

Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation: increasing numbers of successful donations (Scotland) (closing date 14 March 2017)

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00511160.pdf>

**** Reforming GCSEs, AS and A levels in biblical Hebrew** (closing date 23 March 2017)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-biblical-hebrew>

The UK's policy towards the Middle East Peace Process (closing date 30 March 2017)

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news-parliament-2015/middle-east-peace-process-inquiry-16-17/>

Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill (closing date 10 April 2017)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/adoption-and-children-northern-ireland-bill>

Workplace Diversity (Wales) (closing date not stated)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/wtucdiversity>

[TOP](#)

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SCO29438