

# Political Affairs Digest

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

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Oral Answers

#### Religious Dress and Symbols: Workplace

2. **David Amess:** What assessment the Church of England has made of the implications of the European Court of Justice ruling of March 2017 on wearing religious dress and symbols in the workplace. [909693]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** The Church of England was very concerned by the judgment of the European Court of Justice that stated that blanket bans on the wearing of political, philosophical or religious signs do not amount to cases of direct discrimination, because that conflicts with the pre-existing rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. By leaving the European Union, we presumably stand some chance of resolving such inconsistencies.

**David Amess:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is yet another reason to be pleased that last year the British people took the decision to leave the European Union? The ruling was deeply offensive to people of all faiths and totally unnecessary.

**Caroline Spelman:** Yes, and it was completely at odds with the statutory purpose of the Church of England, which was put far better than I possibly could by the head of the Church, Her Majesty the Queen, when in 2012 she made it clear that the Church of England “has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country.” That is what we should be able to do if we can resolve this inconsistency.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-04-20/debates/6052C7F6-85EA-45C9-AAA5-926B1C282C6E/ReligiousDressAndSymbolsWorkplace>

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### Antisemitism

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

**John Mann [70456]** To ask the Prime Minister, how many meetings she has had and with whom at which anti-Semitism was discussed.

**John Mann [70457]** To ask the Prime Minister, how many times she has discussed (a) anti-Semitism and (b) anti-Semitism on the internet with her (i) Cabinet colleagues and (ii) international counterparts.

**Theresa May:** Anti-Semitism continues to be a problem in this country which is

why it is right that, as a Government, we are able to demonstrate the seriousness with which we take it, as we do for other forms of hate crime.

This Government has led the way in adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of anti-Semitism and continues to build on the solid work of the cross-Government working group on tackling anti-Semitism, which ensures that we are alive to any issues and concerns of the Jewish community and can respond quickly. I and ministerial colleagues are in regular contact with representatives of the Jewish community, including the Jewish Leadership Council, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Community Security Trust and other key stakeholders. Concerns about the levels of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism on the internet are discussed by the relevant Cabinet ministers as and when the need arises, and with international counterparts.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-04-13/70456/>

and

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-04-13/70457/>

### Faith Schools

**John Pugh** [69843] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of state-funded faith schools are non-Christian.

**Caroline Dinenage:** There are 85 non-Christian state-funded faith schools, which represents 1.2% of all state-funded faith schools. This data is derived from Table 2c in Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, 2016, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2016>

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-03-29/69843/>

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## [Israel](#)

### House of Lords Written Answers

#### Israel: Gaza

**Baroness Tonge** [HL6543] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations are they making to the government of Israel regarding the reported contamination of water in the Gaza Strip.

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** While we have not raised with the Israeli authorities any specific issue of contamination of water in the Gaza Strip, we do raise with them our concerns about the quality of water in the Occupied Territories. We have noted that the World Health Organisation has assessed that 90-95% of water in Gaza is undrinkable. UK technical assistance has aided the feasibility study of a proposed Gaza desalination plant.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-04-03/HL6543/>

#### Gaza: Cancer

**Baroness Tonge** [HL6547] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel regarding increasing rates of cancer in Gaza since 2008, and claims by Dr Khalid Thabet, head of the Oncology Department at the Shifa Hospital, that that increase may be linked to Israel's reported use of depleted uranium in 2008.

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** While we have not raised this specific issue with the Israeli authorities, we continue to press for measures that will help relieve the humanitarian suffering of those in Gaza.

It is not clear whether Israeli forces have used Depleted Uranium munitions in Gaza. We are conscious that there is some concern about a possible link between the use of Depleted Uranium (DU) ammunition and medical problems such as cancers and birth defects. Environmental monitoring in areas where DU munitions have been used has confirmed the presence of DU at levels far too low to have any detectable health impact. These observations are consistent with the findings of many agencies and with the recent World Health Organisation statement, that, "for the general population, neither civilian nor military use of DU is likely to produce radiation doses significantly above normal background levels".

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-04-03/HL6547/>

### **Israel: Palestinians**

**Baroness Afshar** [HL6575] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the answer by Baroness Anelay of St Johns on 3 April (HL Deb, col 844), what representations they have made to the government of Israel to respect the terms of the Balfour Declaration, and to cease the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands.

**Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** It has long been the Government's view that Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is governed by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to which Israel is a state party. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including settlements and the treatment of Palestinian children in military custody.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-04-04/HL6575/>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2017-04-03/debates/632A5268-21B5-4F91-884A-B339C52A0109/BalfourDeclaration>

## **Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

**"Peace for many people in the Middle East remains a remote prospect and a distant memory."**

Statement by Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East. ...

This year marks fifty years since the Six Day War. This year either we move towards peace, with the strong support of the region and the international community, or we face an uncertain and dangerous future. Unless the parties show leadership, including the willingness to make tough compromises, the risk of terrorism and instability will increase. Israelis and Palestinians cannot afford another fifty years of that.

The UK's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process is clear: we support a negotiated two-state solution leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

However that vision grows distant. As the British Foreign Secretary said last month the UK strongly condemns Israel's decision to found a new settlement deep in the West Bank; the first such decision for over 25 years. Such announcements are contrary to international law and seriously undermine the prospects of two states for two peoples. As

a strong friend of Israel, and one prepared to stand up for Israel when it faces bias and unreasonable criticism, the UK urges Israel not to take steps, which move us away from our shared goal of peace and security.

It was because of our support for the two-state solution, and commitment to Israel as the Jewish homeland, that we voted for resolution 2334. But we recognise the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is deeply complex, settlements are not the only obstacle to peace. The people of Israel deserve to live free from the scourge of terrorism and anti-Semitic incitement, which as the Quartet report sets out, undermine the prospects for a two-state solution.

It is critical that the Palestinian leadership implement the recommendations of the Quartet Report and continue their efforts to tackle terror and incitement, strengthen institutions, and develop a sustainable economy.

We must continue to press Israelis and Palestinians to refrain from actions which make peace more difficult. It's because the conflict between Israel and Palestine is one of the central issues in the Middle East that the UK supports a regional approach to peace. The changing regional context, the Arab Peace Initiative, and converging Arab and Israeli interests do present an opening.

We recognise that impetus is needed and we welcome President Trump's interest in working for a deal that meets the requirements of both parties. The UK's view remains that the two-state solution is the best way to achieve this and is ready to do all that we can to support this.

We do not underestimate the challenges, but if both parties show leadership, peace is possible.

**To read the full statement see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/peace-for-many-people-in-the-middle-east-remains-a-remote-prospect-and-a-distant-memory>

## United Nations

### **With 'Perfect Storm' Engulfing Middle East, Divisions Open Door for Foreign Intervention, Manipulation, Coordinator Tells Security Council**

... Briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov said that a "perfect storm" had engulfed the region, with divisions opening the door to foreign intervention and manipulation. ...

The Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine said that, in a time of simmering crises and declining optimism, Middle East instability centred on the question of Palestine. Condemning Israel's disrespect for Council decisions, he stressed that the colonization, fragmentation and annexation of Palestinian land would never bring peace. Israel must comply with Council demands.

Israel's representative noted that the Council had met regularly for 17 years to discuss the Middle East under the false assumption that all regional ills could be traced to his country. It was time to end the obsessive focus on Israel, focus on dictators who gassed their own people, and classify Hizbullah and Hamas as terrorist organizations, he emphasized, adding that Iran was at the heart of an "alliance of evil". ...

Many speakers emphasized the centrality of the Palestinian question — 70 years after the historic General Assembly resolution on the partition of Palestine — reiterating calls for the two sides to resume direct negotiations on the basis of a two-State solution. Numerous delegates renewed calls for Israel to halt settlement activities immediately, in accordance with Council resolutions, including most recently resolution 2334 (2016), adopted in December 2016. ...

France's representative warned that any escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict risked destabilizing the entire region, stressing that the disappearance of a two-State solution

would plunge the situation “into the unknown”. His counterpart from China said Palestine remained at the crux of the Middle East issue. ...

Nickolay Mladenov ... [noted] the potency of the question of Palestine as a symbol and rallying cry that extremist groups could easily misappropriate and exploit, he said that ending the occupation and realizing a two-State solution would not solve all the region’s problems. As long as the conflict persisted, it would continue to feed those problems, he emphasized. He noted recent reports that Israel had adopted a policy of restraint concerning the building of settlements, describing their construction as illegal under international law and urged an end to all such activities.

On the Palestinian side, he continued, multiple worrying developments were further cementing the divide between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and dangerously increasing the risk of escalation. Calling on all parties to come together and resolve daily electricity outages in Gaza, he said Hamas had tightened its grip on the enclave by forming an administrative committee seen by many as a direct challenge to the legitimate Palestinian Government.

Taking up the question of displacement, he described living conditions in refugee camps as extremely harsh, noting that young Palestinians were particularly vulnerable to the influence of extremists and religious radicals. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12800.doc.htm>

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## **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>

#### **Promotion of Israeli-Palestinian Peace (United Kingdom Participation)**

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

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## **Consultations** \*\* new or updated today

#### **Independent review of hate crime legislation** [in Scotland] (closing date 12 May 2017)

<https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/hate-crime/2f6c8d5f/>

#### **Caste in Great Britain and Equality Law** (closing date 18 July 2017)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/caste-in-great-britain-and-equality-law-a-public-consultation>

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