

Political Affairs Brief

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Holocaust

Prime Minister's Questions

Answered by Harriet Harman

col 808 Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Today is Holocaust memorial day, 65 years after the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that although the evil of the holocaust is unique, its lessons must be applied to the racism and anti-Semitism of today, so that a better society can be enjoyed by everyone?

Ms Harman: I support absolutely what my hon. Friend has said. We in this House regard Holocaust memorial day, which is today, as very important. There will be a debate in the House tomorrow and there is a book of remembrance that can be signed. The work of the Holocaust Educational Trust is very important indeed, but we must also bear in mind the lessons that come out of the holocaust about prejudice, discrimination and anti-Semitism, which we must fight wherever they rear their head in this country.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100127/debtext/100127-0003.htm>

Downing Street

PM's message on Holocaust Memorial Day

Today is about one of the indelible events in human history - where the worst of human evil took millions of lives, but could not extinguish what is best in the human spirit.

The badge that was meant as a mark of shame is the star that still shines in the world. So what we commemorate today is not the hate but the hope. But that hope for the reign of justice and decency, for a time where the only race that matters is the human race, was watered with the tears and summoned by the cries of six million and more.

Throughout my life I have read of persecution and pogroms against the Jewish people; of the oppression of Slavs, the Roma, the mentally ill and the disabled. I have read of the murder of trade unionists, Jehovah's witnesses, political opponents and the gay community. I had immersed myself in the history - had even written books about it - and so I had thought I was prepared for my visit to Auschwitz last year.

But I now know that I wasn't and could not have been.

Imagination helps us prepare by linking what we are about to experience to something we have experienced before. But I have never before looked at the belongings of a three year old gassed by those who saw her not as a precious child, but as something less

than human. Never before had I touched a chamber wall gouged by desperate hands or gazed upon a mound of human hair.

And so my personal experience of visiting the death camps was a profoundly unsettling sense of 'never before'. But it led to an even stronger conviction of 'never again', to a renewed conviction that if we learn the right lessons, the holocaust can leave that timeless legacy of hope.

It may sound strange to talk of hope in the context of such horror. But i am always inspired by the story of the rabbi who had not been in a camp and was asked why he did so much for holocaust education when he was not himself a survivor. And he replied that he was a survivor; that we all are - not just all Jews, but all of humanity. We treaded the abyss - and yet we found a way to transcend it, to survive and build a future.

One of my favourite quotes is from the pastor Jim Wallis - that hope is not a feeling, but a decision. And so today we have a decision to make. We can choose to commemorate the holocaust by looking back only on the unspeakable terror and toll. Or we can be lifted and sustained by the memories of the people who retained the ability to be human, even in the most inhuman places, the camp inmates who continued to toast 'l'chiam' - to life - right there in the factories of death.

And so as we mark this year the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, let us never forget what happened is an epic of courage as well as cruelty, that our distance of decades from the holocaust does not diminish but increase the burden of memory - our obligation to remember and to resist.

And to the survivors who remain, let us say that your bravery will never be forgotten, that you have passed to a new generation an example that we will embrace and pass on to our children in turn. Because what you did there and since reveals to us all something which I only truly began to comprehend in the fullness of its truth standing on that railway line in Poland— that we honour the dead by celebrating and enlarging life— and we defeat the forces of hate by choosing faith and hope.

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page22308>

Scottish Parliament: Time for Reflection

Time for Reflection normally opens the weekly session of the Scottish Parliament each Wednesday, and is presented by invited speakers from different faith communities.

The Right Rev William Hewitt (Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland): ... Since 2001, people in Britain have observed today, 27 January, as Holocaust memorial day. Yesterday, I was privileged to join some members of the Parliament at a powerful and moving event organised by Glasgow City Council, at which pupils from Shawlands academy who had visited Auschwitz last year shared their thoughts and feelings with us. We also heard from the lady in Tennessee who founded the paper-clips project, which is a project for schoolchildren to create a tribute to the estimated 6 million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. The school decided to represent one life with one paper-clip, and therefore to collect 6 million paper-clips. They have been sent from all over the world. At the last count, 30 million paper-clips had been collected.

The idea of a national Holocaust commemoration was proposed with three broad and interrelated aims in mind: to commemorate the Holocaust; to acknowledge the repeated occurrences of genocide around the world since 1945; and to renew the commitment of British people to combat racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia and to work for an inclusive, caring and open society. All those aims are important to us and to all of society. For those of us who take the gospel seriously, this day provides a particularly valuable opportunity for us to reflect on some of the core concerns of society and our Christian faith in the light of world history. Although the focus of the day remains the central event that we call the Holocaust, it is also intended to provide an opportunity to reflect on issues that are raised by all atrocities, especially those events that have been designated as genocides, such as those that took place in Bosnia and Cambodia.

We are reminded of the reality that evil is still powerful in our world. Today gives us an opportunity to strengthen our resolve to protect every community from ethnic cleansing and elimination. Neither the Holocaust nor any other genocide would have been possible without whole societies being told that certain groups of people were alien, dangerous, contemptible or not fully human. We do not have to go terribly far in our own society, here in Scotland, to find dehumanising language, stereotyped images and hostile attitudes expressed against those who, some would claim, are different, so that we may dismiss them as alien or unwanted.

Today, we want to affirm the blessings that diversity can bring to our society and to acknowledge that all true faiths engender compassion, justice, tolerance and living peacefully within the worldwide community, that all people might enjoy the right of life and the pursuit of happiness and livelihood.

Today, in this busy world, we best remember and honour the victims of the Holocaust and other atrocities if we order our lives—personally, nationally and internationally—to ensure that there will never be another time in our history when we make victims of anyone. It is not enough to put the past behind us and move on. I hope and pray that we can all find the wisdom to ensure that such events never happen again.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-10/sor0127-02.htm#Col23095>

Scottish Parliament Motion

S3M-5629 Ken Macintosh: Holocaust Memorial Day 2010—That the Parliament notes 27 January 2010 as Holocaust Memorial Day and urges all Scots to unite in remembering the victims and survivors of the Holocaust; recognises that the lessons learned from the tragedy of the Holocaust are of fundamental importance for successive generations; believes that continued vigilance and opposition to discrimination, persecution and racism is vital if such terrible events are to be prevented from ever happening again; also wishes, however, to celebrate the legacy of hope provided by those who survived and those who helped others survive; particularly wishes to remember the Rev Ernest Levy from Giffnock, a survivor of Auschwitz Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen who died last year; notes that, despite enduring appalling suffering during the Holocaust, the Rev Levy never lost his warmth or humanity and devoted himself to educating others, and believes that the best way to remember and pay tribute to Holocaust survivors like Ernest Levy is to ensure that their inspiring stories continues to be told to future generations.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/business/motions/Default.aspx?motionid=18213>

Welsh Assembly Government

National service held to mark Holocaust Memorial Day Wales 2010

The First Minister and Cllr Berman were joined by Rabbi Aron Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles. Following the service, wreaths were laid at the Raoul Wallenberg Memorial in Alexandra Gardens and the First Minister was presented with a crystal Menorah by Rabbi Hier.

The First Minister said: “This year marks the 65th Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Holocaust Memorial Day is an opportunity to remember those who died and to show respect to those who survived. It is a time to reflect on the most shameful period in the history of modern Europe and an important opportunity to remember those killed in subsequent genocides including Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.”

Cllr Berman said: “It’s very important that we mark Holocaust Memorial Day in Wales which helps us to honour those whose lives were taken away from them. It also helps us to teach a new generation about this painful time in history in the hope that they will learn from the mistakes of the past. With the capital being home to Wales’ largest Jewish

community, I'm pleased that the All-Wales Remembrance Service will be held at Cardiff City Hall. I would encourage those who are attending the service, as well as those who are unable to attend, to visit the recently planted Anne Frank Memorial Tree in Alexandra Gardens. Anne Frank is a poignant symbol of all those who lost their lives during the Holocaust and a visit to her memorial tree is a fitting way to commemorate all those whose lives were cut short." ...

To read the full press release see

<http://wales.gov.uk/news/latest/100127holocaustmemorialday/?lang=en>

Northern Ireland Executive

Junior Minister hosts Holocaust Legacy of Hope event

... The theme of this year's event is Legacy of Hope and will mark the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp. On hearing about the experiences of those who came through the Holocaust Junior Minister Newton has said: "We cannot fail to be moved by the survivors' stories. Their resilience, their amazing capacity to rebuild their lives from the depth of despair and the contribution that each one has made to the world around them makes them exceptional. We need to learn from the Holocaust so that our attitudes, our words and our choices will be a positive influence on our community."

Commenting on the 1945 liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau Junior Minister Newton added: "Sixty-five years after Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated we are still fighting many of the evils which led to its construction. It is so important that we pass on a 'Legacy of Hope' to our young people. By understanding how the Holocaust occurred, future generations may be spared the horror of repeating it."

Attending the City Hall event are members of the local Jewish community and representatives from a range of faith communities, ethnic minority and other groups. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-ofmdfm/news-ofmdfm-270110-junior-minister-hosts.htm>

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Israel

Westminster Hall Debate

EU-Israel Trade Agreement

includes

col 313WH Phyllis Starkey: ... Under the EU-Israel trade agreement, produce from Israel enters the UK and other EU member states under a preferential agreement that exempts it from import duties. The agreement only applies to Israeli territory that is within its internationally recognised borders, and that has recently been reaffirmed in a legal ruling from the European Court of Justice.

The Israeli authorities have long had a cavalier attitude to compliance with the agreement. ... Not only is that defrauding the EU taxpayer by avoiding legitimate import duty, but it sets a dangerous precedent that could allow other countries unilaterally to reinterpret their agreements with the EU. ...

An indication of the likely scale of abuse can be estimated from the total duty raised on settlement goods in 2009, which was just under £22,000, compared with demands for duty in 2005-08 that averaged £110,000 per annum, which is five times the level raised in 2009 and suggests that at least 80 per cent. of settlement goods are imported without duty being paid on them. ...

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100127/halltext/100127h0009.htm#10012764000002>

Phyllis Starkey: ... The problem is either that documentation is insufficiently detailed to reveal all settlement goods' origin or there is deliberate falsification at the Israeli end. ... If HMRC has doubts it can make a verification request, but that request just goes straight back to the same Israeli authorities who mislabelled the produce in the first place. ... the Israeli authorities, the export companies and the producers all have a strong interest in misrepresenting the origin of settlement produce. First, they have a direct financial incentive, through the exemption from import duty if the goods are alleged to be from Israel. Secondly, there is the possibility of evading consumer boycotts aimed at settlement goods; that has become particularly important now that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has insisted that guidance more clearly identifies settlement goods for the consumer. It has to be said that they have a track record of deliberate falsification. ...

col 318WH **The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Sarah McCarthy-Fry):** ... Since 1 February 2005, [Revenue and Customs] has rejected some 515 proofs of preferential origin under the arrangement, and has issued customs duty demands totalling £289,000. The figure of 515 represents about 56 per cent. of all Israeli proofs of preferential origin, which have, to date, been checked on the basis of risk.

However, since the introduction of the technical arrangement, Revenue and Customs has initiated some 27 verification inquiries with the authorities in Israel when it has had concerns about the accuracy of the place of production that has been inserted on the proof of preferential origin. ...

Since the end of July 2008, officials in the UK Border Agency have, at the request of Revenue and Customs, undertaken 51 targeted physical examinations of dates, frozen sweetcorn, fresh herbs, avocado pears, grapes and tomatoes imported under the EU-Israel agreement. We now understand that in the case of avocados, the intelligence received may have been flawed. ...

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100127/halltext/100127h0010.htm>

col 320WH **Sarah McCarthy-Fry:** ... There is no blanket legal requirement for the place of production to be inserted on all produce or its packaging. In the absence of such a marking, as was the case in a number of the examinations undertaken to date, there is little that customs can do when the accompanying proof of preferential origin shows that the produce was produced in an Israeli location. Similarly, the Department does not have sufficient evidence to the effect that the goods were not produced in Israel where "produce of Israel" has been inserted on the product or its packaging. ...

... new civil penalty provisions came into force on 24 December 2009, as a result of which Revenue and Customs can issue a financial penalty where an importer persistently claims preference on products that are not entitled to such treatment, which will be in addition to the liability to pay the full rate of customs duty. ... We will explore with supermarkets the possibility and feasibility of using their tracking systems post-importation to identify imports of goods that were not entitled to the preference claimed.

We will continue to work closely with the European Commission and other Government Departments with the objective of ensuring compliance with the rules in this complex and sensitive area. That will include pressing the Commission to monitor the operation of the 2005 technical arrangement even more closely.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100127/halltext/100127h0011.htm>

UK Parliamentary Question

Palestine

Baroness Tonge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what reports they have received from the World Bank concerning the development of economic enclaves in the occupied West Bank of Palestine. [HL815]

Lord Brett: We have received no reports from the World Bank specifically addressing the development of economic enclaves in the West Bank. The World Bank has, however, produced a number of reports assessing the impact of Israeli movement and access restrictions on economic development in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Full details of these reports are available on the World Bank website (www.worldbank.org).

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100127w0007.htm#10012786001039>

United Nations

Senior UN official voices concern over impasse in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations

A climate of mistrust between Israel and Palestinians over settlement expansion, forced evictions, military incursions, rocket fire and the closure of border crossings remains at the heart of the stalled peace process in the Middle East, a top United Nations official warned today. ... Mr. Fernandez-Taranco pointed to the nearly weekly protests by both Israelis and Palestinians against Israeli actions in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, where several families have been evicted and a further 25 face the same threat, among the growing tensions at the root of the impasse. ...

Turning to Gaza, he said that the failure to address the issues that led to Israel's military operation last year and its aftermath has created an unsustainable situation and a "sense of hopelessness" for the population, over half of which are under the age of 18.

"There was a notable increase in the number of projectiles fired from Gaza by militant groups during this reporting period," said Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, with over 70 rockets fired and 19 landing in Israel. "Reports of weapons smuggling continue to cause concern." He added that there were also 20 Israeli incursions and 11 air strikes in the Strip, leading to 11 Palestinian deaths, including six civilians. "We urge all parties to refrain from violence and respect international humanitarian law." ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=33595&Cr=middle+east&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/pbc0082801m.151-157.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/pbc0032801m.27-33.html>

**** Equality Bill**

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

Committee Stage, House of Lords

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100127-0002.htm#10012761000415>

Flood and Water Management Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

End of Life Assistance Bill

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

European Parliament

Proposal for a Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers

The European Parliament Agriculture Committee considered a proposed amendment to the above Regulation that: "*Meat and meat products derived from animals that have not been stunned prior to slaughter, i.e. have been slaughtered using special methods should be labelled as "Meat from slaughter without stunning" [because] To avoid misunderstandings and ensure that consumers are properly informed, such products need to be flagged up.*"

The Minute is not yet available online, but we have been informed that the amendment was defeated.

A link to the Minute will be included in PAB when it becomes available.

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Consultations

**** new or updated**

**** closes in 5 days**

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

Death Certification, Burial, and Cremation (Scotland) (closes 21 April 2010)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/300112/0093686.pdf>

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