

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 Questions

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he (a) has taken and (b) plans to take in the next six months to protect the Jewish community from anti-Semitic attacks; and if he will make a statement. [321840]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The Government take attacks on the Jewish community very seriously and provide a co-ordinated and continual response.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) National Community Tension Team (NCTT) carries out community impact assessments and identifies particular Jewish communities for reassurance activity. The NCTT also coordinates a national operation to ensure security and reassure Jewish communities during High Holy Days.

The Community Safety Trust (CST) was a recipient of funding from the 2009-10 Hate Crime section of the Victims Fund to allow them to improve both their reporting of anti-Semitic incidents and the support provided to victims. In addition, in London, the Metropolitan Police's Operation Rainbow Team, the uniformed policing response to counter-terrorism, has been working with the CST on the security of Jewish buildings.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100316/text/100316w0007.htm#10031682000003>

Listed Places of Worship (Grants)

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): What plans he has for the future of the listed places of worship grants scheme; and if he will make a statement. [322192]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): The Government's plans for the listed places of worship scheme beyond 31 March next year will be announced in the spending review later in the year.

Tony Baldry: I hope that it will be good news. The Minister will know that the scheme involves money given to help defray the cost of value added tax on repairing listed buildings. Many communities up and down the country are trying to keep their churches in good repair, and either the scheme has to be extended or the Government must restore heritage as part of national lottery funding. Does he agree that we cannot expect this important element of our built heritage to be done on thin air?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. This scheme has now generated some £100 million for 10,000 buildings since it was introduced in 2001.

We have recognised that listed churches are a special case. Our long-term aim is that a lower rate of VAT should be agreed at European level for instances of that kind, but in the meantime the joint English Heritage/Heritage Lottery Fund scheme is providing £25 million a year. We will look at that particular scheme again in the spending review.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100316/debtext/100316-0002.htm#10031668000024>

Justice: Arrest Warrants

Baroness Northover: To ask Her Majesty's Government further to the Written Answer by Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead on 22 February (WA 233-4), which European Union countries have asked for information from them about the issues arising from the United Kingdom's arrest warrant procedure; and when those requests were made. [HL2292]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead): Officials gave information on issues arising from the application of the UK's arrest warrant procedures in cases of universal jurisdiction during regular EU-wide discussions on foreign relations.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100316w0004.htm#10031674000870>

Ministry of Justice

Proposals for changing the law on arrest warrants for universal jurisdiction crimes.

The proposals in the paper concern the ability of individuals to secure the arrest of foreign visitors on suspicion of certain very grave offences (for example, war crimes under the Geneva Conventions Act 1957) that can be tried in England and Wales even if they were committed overseas. Individuals can do this on the basis of far less evidence than the Crown Prosecution Service would need to bring a charge, or a jury would need before it could properly convict. The Government is worried about how this might affect relations with other states.

The Government proposes to change the law so that only the Crown Prosecution Service would be able to begin prosecutions for this small group of 'universal jurisdiction' offences, where the offence is alleged to have been committed outside the UK by a person who is not a British national. This would ensure that action is taken only where expert and independent investigators and prosecutors in the police and CPS are confident there is a realistic likelihood of a successful prosecution.

Copies of the paper have been sent to interested parties with a request for comments by Tuesday 6 April.

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/latest-updates/arrest-warrants.htm>

Arrest warrants – universal jurisdiction Note by the Ministry of Justice

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/docs/arrests-warrants.pdf>

Draft clause: Prosecution of certain extra-territorial offences: England and Wales

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/docs/private-prosecutions-draft-clause.pdf>

Downing Street e-Petition

We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to ban any form of religious assembly in state schools and remove religious education from the national curriculum.

Government response

The Government has no plans at present to reform or review legislation as it currently stands with regard to teaching religious education (RE) and the provision of a daily act of collective worship in maintained schools.

All community, foundation or voluntary schools must offer a daily act of collective worship which is broadly of a Christian character in keeping with the religious traditions of this country. This should be appropriate to the age and family background of the pupils.

Collective worship is a long standing aspect of school life. Many parents want their children to benefit from collective worship whether or not they have a strong Christian belief themselves. Legislation is clear that collective worship must be appropriate to the pupils' age and family background. Therefore, if the head teacher of the school feels it is inappropriate to have Christian collective worship, the school can apply for a determination from the local authority to have the 'broadly Christian' requirement lifted, although collective worship must still be provided. We believe that collective worship provides the opportunity for pupils to reflect on spiritual and moral issues and to explore the concept of belief. It also offers a unique opportunity to develop and celebrate the school's ethos and establish shared values within the school community. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from collective worship, and pupils in the sixth form have the right to withdraw without parental consent. This right should be freely exercisable and a school must agree to any such request. Parents do not have to state their reasons for wanting to withdraw their child from collective worship.

Every maintained school must, by law, provide RE – a statutory part of the basic school curriculum. Religion and beliefs inform our values and are reflected in what we say and how we behave. RE is an important subject in itself, developing an individual's knowledge and understanding of the religions and beliefs which form part of contemporary society. We believe that it is important to continue to teach RE in maintained schools because it plays an important part in children and young peoples' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. RE also contributes to pupils' personal development and well-being, and to community cohesion by promoting mutual respect and tolerance in a diverse society. However, parents do have the right to withdraw their child from RE. This right should be freely exercisable and a school must agree to any such request. Parents do not have to state their reasons for wanting to withdraw their child from RE.

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page22857>

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UK Parliamentary Question

Palestinians: Politics and Government

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the political situation in Gaza. [322400]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The situation in Gaza is very serious, and it has the potential to derail any peace effort, but Hamas cannot be allowed to block peace negotiations. We will continue to work both to improve the situation in Gaza and to move peace talks forward.

We have made available £26.8 million for the relief operation and are pressing Israel to open the crossings more fully to ensure the people of Gaza receive the humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials they need.

We are extremely concerned by reports that Hamas has moved violently against its political opponents and those deemed to be collaborators with Israeli forces. The UK calls for Hamas to halt such acts along with its terrorist attacks against southern Israel.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100316/text/100316w0016.htm#10031689000025>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Katy Clark (1107) Palestinian farmers – That this House notes with concern the decision of the UK Border Agency to deny visas to three Palestinian farmers, Lina Mahmoud, Nahed Beshariah and Belal Eid, who were hoping to visit the UK to mark Fairtrade Fortnight; congratulates these three individuals for their hard work in being involved in the production of the first ever Fairtrade product from the occupied territories; supports the excellent work of Zaytoun in exporting Fairtrade olive oil from the West Bank to the UK; further notes that in 2009 the Prime Minister expressed himself as being delighted with the initiative; and therefore urges the Government to intervene and allow these farmers entry into the UK.

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=40742&SESSION=903>

Scottish Trades Union Congress

Preliminary Congress Agenda

includes:

103. Peace and Justice

“That this Congress congratulates the General Council in continuing to ensure that the STUC plays an important and high profile role in the campaign for international peace and justice.

“Congress is deeply concerned that there are significant threats to world peace and justice caused by occupation, threats to self-determination, nuclear proliferation and individual and state-sponsored terrorism.

- “In particular, Congress notes: ...
- the failure of the Israeli Government to implement UN resolutions against the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and for the right of return for Palestinian refugees; ...

“Congress urges the General Council to continue to lobby the UK and Scottish Government and in particular to campaign for:

- a sovereign Palestinian state peacefully co-existing alongside a sovereign Israel in a nuclear-weapon free Middle East; ...

Mover: National Union of Rail, Maritime & Transport Workers

104. Palestine

“That this Congress applauds the work by the FBU in supporting Palestinian workers through the visit in November 2009 to Scotland of eight firefighters from Nablus. Positive investment in Palestinian public services should now be encouraged throughout the Scottish Trade Union Movement, with the creation by the STUC of a training/skills forum for Palestinian workers, following discussions with the relevant organisations, such as the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions.”

Mover: Fire Brigades Union

105. Israeli War Crimes

“That this Congress notes that a year after the barbaric onslaught of Gaza, the collective punishment and near imprisonment of its people by the Israeli occupation forces continues.

“Congress welcomes the efforts of the Secretary and General Council to carry forward the 2009 resolution on boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

“Congress recognises, however, that our own Government is complicit in allowing Israel to continue to act with impunity.

“Congress asks the General Council and affiliates to campaign against the complicity of our politicians, and demands their support for the United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council that Israel should be prosecuted for war crimes.”

Mover: Midlothian TUC

106. Jewish National Fund and Histadrut

“That this Congress is proud of the STUC's history of support for the rights of the Palestinian people, and the leading role it has taken, alongside COSATU and ICTU, as TU Confederations supporting a policy of Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions (BDS) against the Israeli state, in support of the Palestinian people.

“Congress now believes that a more critical policy should be adopted in relation to the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the Histadrut TU Confederation.

“Congress believes that the JNF was founded, and continues to act, to promote exclusively Jewish access to land in Israel, Palestine and the occupied territories, to the exclusion of Palestinians.

“Congress believes that the JNF's activities, and the organisations that it supports, function almost exclusively for the purpose of securing and expanding the Israeli state's Zionist colonisation of Palestine, the occupied territories and Palestinian-owned land within Israel.

“Congress notes the longstanding links between the JNF and the Histadrut and believes that the Histadrut requires to be isolated, as part of our wider policy of BDS, as a tactic to pressurise it to amend its policies and practices, as they concern Palestinian workers and the wider struggle for self determination of the Palestinian people.

“Congress therefore calls on the General Council to:

- ask Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) to review whether the acceptance of the JNF (registered as KKL) in Scotland as a Scottish Charity is consistent with its public benefit test and with OSCR's wider duty to maintain the good reputation of Scottish charities;
- support and participate in the JNF Campaign International Conference being held in Edinburgh on 8/9 May; and
- withdraw its recognition of Histadrut until a time when Congress feels it follows policies and practices consistent with international trade union standards of equality and solidarity.”

Mover: Dundee TUC

See also motions 90-93 re racism, and the BNP

<http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Congress%202010/Preliminary%20Agenda.doc>

United Nations

After unrest in East Jerusalem, Ban calls for calm

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today appealed for restraint from all sides after clashes erupted in East Jerusalem today, pledging to push for a resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians in a bid to find a solution to the long-running conflict. ... He underscored that the status of Jerusalem, “a city holy to three religions,” is subject to final negotiation. “I call for restraint and calm by all.” ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=34095&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

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Foreign Affairs

UK Parliamentary Question

Iran: Religious Freedom

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the human rights situation of Jewish people in Iran since October 2009; and if he will make a statement. [321839]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Jews are one of three religious minorities, alongside Christians and Zoroastrians, which are constitutionally permitted to practise their religious faith in Iran. In reality however, they cannot hold positions in the judiciary, police and security forces, limiting the role they are permitted to play in public life. Although Jews have enjoyed a relative degree of freedom to practise their religion, including the use of Hebrew for religious instruction, they face various limitations on their rights to travel and to communicate with Jewish communities outside Iran, especially in Israel.

Iran's anti-Israel policy continues to create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation among Iran's Jews, and this fear has been propagated by President Ahmadinejad's repeated denial of the Holocaust, anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli propaganda in the media. The Government have raised concerns over the treatment of Iran's religious minorities on many occasions with the Iranian authorities, calling on the Iranian authorities to uphold their international legal undertakings to safeguard religious freedom and to stop discrimination and persecution on the grounds of religion.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100316/text/100316w0015.htm#10031689000019>

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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>

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>

**** Equality Bill**

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

notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldbills/039/amend/am039-c.htm>

**** Flood and Water Management Bill**

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

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldbills/028/amend/ml028-ir.htm>

Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/prosecutionofoffencesact1985amendment.html>

Scottish Parliament

End of Life Assistance Bill

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

Draft Census Order

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2010/draft/pdf/sdsi_9780111008379_en.pdf

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Consultations

** new or updated

2011 Census Statistical Outputs (England and Wales) (closes 26 March 2010)

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/consultations/open-consultations/2011-output-consultation---main-statistical-outputs/index.html>

Equality Bill: Draft Codes of Conduct (closes 2 April 2010)

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legislative-framework/equality-bill/equality-bill-codes-of-practice-consultation/#1>

** Arrest warrants – universal jurisdiction Note by the Ministry of Justice

(closes 6 April 2010)

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/docs/arrests-warrants.pdf>

Draft clause: Prosecution of certain extra-territorial offences: England and Wales

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/docs/private-prosecutions-draft-clause.pdf>

Equality Bill: Draft Guidance (closes 16 April 2010)

<http://ehrc-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal>

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

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

Call for Evidence on the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill (12 May 2010)

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/endLifeAsstBill/currentInquiries.htm>

Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Guidance (closes 14 May)

http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/consultations/HA_strategic_guide_draft.pdf

2011 Census Statistical Outputs (Scotland) (closes 14 May 2010)

<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/census/censushm2011/preparations/consultation-and-research/formal-consultations/spring-10-consultation.html>

Reform of the coroner system (closes 1 July 2010)

Includes questions as to when it may be appropriate to carry out a non-invasive post-mortem examination, for example by means of MRI scan.

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

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