

Political Affairs Brief

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Higher Education: Anti-Semitism

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent reports he has received on (a) anti-Semitic and (b) anti-Israel speeches made by speakers at British university campuses; and if he will make a statement. [323656]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has received a number of letters from Jewish students following a Jewish student lobby of Parliament about "hate speakers" on some university campuses. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) has also written to me about a reported anti-Israel speaker appearing at two universities.

Decisions about external speakers must rest with universities themselves. In this area universities are bound by the law both in protecting freedom of speech on campus, even if that free expression is controversial, and protecting students and staff against harassment or violence. The Government have made clear that there is no place for anti-Semitism or any other form of racism or intolerance in HE. Universities have access to guidance from both Government and the sector itself on promoting good campus relations, which draw out the considerations institutions need to give to free expression on campus and to addressing illegal behaviour.

There is a very clear dividing line set out in law between political debate, discussion of doctrine or faith and incitement to commit or glorify violence or terrorism. This line should not be thought vague. When the law is broken on campus those responsible must be reported to the relevant authorities. There is both a moral duty and importantly a legal obligation to do so.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100323/text/100323w0022.htm#100323121000045>

Criminal Records: Vetting

Mrs. Maria Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with which countries the United Kingdom has bilateral agreements on exchanging criminal records information for employment vetting purposes; and if he will make a statement. [323590]

Meg Hillier: We do not currently have any bilateral agreements in place but we are in negotiation with a number of countries.

We have reached provisional agreement to exchange criminal record information with Australia and New Zealand for employment checking purposes with an

applicant's consent. We are aiming to conclude negotiations around the exact mechanisms for doing so by the end of 2010. We have also reached agreements in principle with Ireland and France in relation to those seeking to work with children.

Within the European Union, under the terms of Council Framework Decision 2009/315/JHA on the organisation and content of the exchange of information extracted from the criminal record between member states, the United Kingdom is told by other member states when a British citizen is convicted of an offence within their jurisdiction. Member states are required to take the necessary measures to comply with this Framework Decision by 27 April 2012. Similarly, information may be received through Interpol channels in relation to British citizens convicted outside the EU. Conviction information received through either channel is recorded on the Police National Computer and so will be disclosed in the same way as convictions in United Kingdom courts.

In many countries individuals, and in some cases third parties, can request criminal records certificates for employment checking purposes. We are currently looking at where we can strengthen the guidance for employers to encourage them to ask to see such certificates, particularly in relation to those seeking work with children and vulnerable adults. We aim to put in place all the information that we have on this process in relation to each country to help employers and prospective employees obtain certificates and understand what is disclosed on them. However, obtaining criminal records is only one aspect of pre-employment checks and good practice is also for employers to obtain character and employment references.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100323/text/100323w0001.htm#10032375000025>

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UK Parliamentary Questions

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he (a) has taken during the last six months and (b) plans to take during the next six months to tackle the shipment of weapons and funds from Iran to (i) Afghanistan, (ii) Iraq, (iii) Lebanon and (iv) Gaza; and if he will make a statement. [323129]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have serious concerns about Iranian support for Iraqi militia groups, the Taleban, Hizballah, Hamas and other Palestinian Rejectionist Groups, including weapons, funds and training. This is unacceptable. It further undermines international confidence in the Iranian regime's intentions, and is at odds with the regime's claim to the international community and its own people that it supports stability in the middle east and Afghanistan.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps at the United Nations he (a) has taken since November 2009 and (b) plans to take in the next six months to seek to prevent (i) weapons and (ii) funds from the government of Iran being sent to terrorist groups in (A) Afghanistan, (B) Iraq, (C) Gaza and (d) Lebanon; and if he will make a statement. [323130]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We continue to urge Iran to comply with international law, including UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs). Iran's transfers of weapons to the groups mentioned are contrary to UNSCRs 1737, 1747, 1803, 1701 (Hezbollah) and 1860 (Gaza). Such behaviour further undermines international confidence in Iran.

We continue to give our full support to the UN Sanctions Committee in pursuing

and investigating sanctions violations. Following a series of sanctions violations by Iran in 2009 (including the interdictions of weapons from Iran on the Hansa India, Monchegorsk and Francop vessels), the UN Sanctions Committee on Iran issued an Implementation Assistance Notice in January 2010. This urged all UN member states to be especially alert to further violations, in particular to exercise enhanced vigilance over all Islamic Republic of Iran shipping lines activity, including subjecting its cargo to enhanced scrutiny.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps at the United Nations he (a) has taken since November 2009 and (b) plans to take in the next six months in response allegations of (i) arming and (ii) funding by Iran of Hamas; and if he will make a statement. [323131]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have serious concerns about the support that Iran provides to groups such as Hamas, which are undermining peace in the middle east through violence. Such support is unacceptable and only serves to undermine regional security. We call on Iran to play a constructive role in fostering peace in the middle east, including through political and diplomatic support to the Palestinian Authority in its attempts to build institutions and improve security.

We continue to push for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 which aims to prevent the illicit trafficking of arms into Gaza.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100323/text/100323w0012.htm#10032390000029>

Gaza

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the European Union Council of Ministers has approved a visit by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton of Upholland, to Gaza; and, if so, when it will take place. [HL2703]

Lord Brett: Procedurally, approval of the European Union Council of Ministers is not required for the intended visit of High Representative Baroness Ashton to Gaza. Baroness Ashton visited Gaza on 18 March.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100323w0002.htm#10032379000324>

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

UK Passports (Use in Dubai Murder)

Full text of David Miliband's statement included in yesterday's PAB

col 134 Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks) (Con): ... We should all regret having to take such measures against a country that is a friend of Britain and with whose diplomats we enjoy good relations, but we cannot permit cloning of, interference with or misuse of British passports by another state. If the Foreign Secretary is truly satisfied, on the basis of all the evidence he has seen, that that has happened in this case, it is right for Britain to take measures both to rectify the situation and to show that it is unacceptable to us.

Is the Foreign Secretary aware that there was a similar case in 1987, when it was discovered that Israel had forged British passports for intelligence operations? On that occasion, the then Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, assured the then Foreign Secretary, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Howe of Aberavon, that it would not happen again. It seems that those assurances have not been upheld. ...

There are many issues on which Britain and Israel quite rightly work closely together: a two-state solution to the middle east peace process, diplomatic action over Iran's nuclear programme and the expansion of trade between our countries to the benefit of all our citizens. But such relations and co-operation must be able to take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust, and it is necessary for that trust to be reaffirmed so that

relations can be as productive as they should be. We therefore think that the measures taken by the Government are right and that the Israeli Foreign Minister, as he considers the Foreign Secretary's letter, should know that it comes with united support across this House. ...

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100323/debtext/100323-0004.htm#10032383000003>

col 136 **David Miliband:** ... It is right to make it clear to the House that no country had as many passports involved in this sorry affair as the United Kingdom; no other country was even close to double digits.

We are clear that we keep our travel advice up to date, so the response that we seek from the Israeli Foreign Minister in reply to my request for a specific assurance will of course affect what our travel advice about the situation and its consequences. ...

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): ... It is indeed intolerable that a close ally should treat Britain and British nationals in this way. I fully support the proportionate measures proposed by the Foreign Secretary today. It is difficult to get the correct balance when dealing with a state such as Israel that is a close friend of this country, but I believe that he has judged it well. ... given that it is alleged that these counterfeit passports were used in an extra-judicial killing by Israeli agents, has the gravity of that misuse been weighed in the balance in the Government's response? Thirdly, and more widely, although I strongly agree with the action that the Foreign Secretary has taken today, may I invite him to reflect on how the expulsion of a diplomat in response to passport fraud, serious though that is, might look to Palestinians in Gaza, the west bank and elsewhere, who have been the victims of more serious breaches of international law by Israel? Given the action that he has taken today, can he assure me that when it comes to policy issues such as the blockade of Gaza and illegal settlements on the west bank, the Government are willing to back stronger condemnation of Israel, as President Obama and other EU countries now appear willing to do?

col 137 **David Miliband:** ... it is my very strong view that engagement with the people and Government of Israel is essential if we are to convey to them the concern we have about issues such as Gaza, which he raised. ...

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on being the first western statesman to take specific action against the serial crimes committed by the Israeli Government? However, he surely must recognise that anybody passing through the corrupt passport control and airport security system at Ben Gurion airport is liable to have her or his passport cloned and abused. ...

David Miliband: ... not only the measures that we have announced but the advice that we have given on the Foreign Office website as of now will provide a degree of warning and protection for any traveller to Israel and will allow them to mitigate the risks that they might face.

col 138 **Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab):** May I ask the Foreign Secretary to clarify whether the diplomat leaving London will be selected by the Israeli ambassador or whether a specific person is being expelled whose fingerprints have been found in relation to this matter? If it is the latter, this is a very limp response. If the person is guilty of being part of this fraudulent dealing with our passports, the House should be told.

David Miliband: As I said very clearly in my statement, the request for an individual to leave-and the decision of the Israelis to accede to that request-was made by us. It was linked, precisely as I have said, in the work that we have done to the investigations that have taken place. We have been very clear with the Israeli authorities about the basis on which we were asking for an individual to leave.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What the Foreign Secretary has described is a criminal conspiracy to facilitate murder, probably contrary to UK domestic law under the terrorism legislation. That being so, has the Foreign Secretary considered what officials not in the Israeli Government or elsewhere not covered by diplomatic privilege may be liable to criminal sanctions before the UK courts?...

David Miliband: ... the procedures for arrest-never mind for prosecution-are not ones that are in the hands of the Government. ...

col 139 **Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway) (Lab):** ... this action was not aberrant-it was a measure of the impunity and illegality with which Israel acts. ...

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): In his statement, the Foreign Secretary said that "we have concluded that there are compelling reasons to believe that Israel was responsible for the misuse of British passports." That being said, why is only one diplomat being removed and why not much higher up the chain? Does the Foreign Secretary believe that the Israeli Government were culpable in the act of deception over the passports and the murder, or does he believe that some quasi-state authority in Israel undertook it in the name of that country?

David Miliband: I make no allegations about quasi-state authorities in this case. Let me address the point that we should have moved, as my hon. Friend put it, higher up the chain. He is saying that we should either have expelled the Israeli ambassador or have withdrawn our ambassador from Israel. I do not believe that that would have been the right thing to do. In fact, it would have been a retrograde thing to do, because it is vital that we are able to express with passion, commitment and principle to the Government of Israel the feelings from across the House and within the Government. It is essential that we are able to do so in this country and in Israel itself. The last thing that we should be advocating is the isolation of Israel; ...

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100323/debtext/100323-0005.htm>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Foreign Secretary discusses response to UK passport abuse on BBC

Foreign Secretary David Miliband discussed actions taken by the Government in response to the abuse of UK passports in the assassination on a senior Hamas leader, on the BBC News channel on 23 March 2010. ...

David Miliband: ... I don't agree ... that relations between Britain and Israel are quote unquote very bad. We have relations that are political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and personal. And across that range Britain tries to work closely with Israel, in many areas does work closely with Israel. However, on this issue we have parted company because of the very serious nature of it. ...

Nicholas Owen: The diplomat to be expelled, can you tell us who that's going to be, what sort of rank this person would have? Is it somebody important or is it just somebody a bit further down the line?

David Miliband: ... I'm not going to name him and I'm not going to say anything more about him other than to confirm what I've already said, which is that we chose him as a result of the investigations that we have undertaken over the last four or five weeks. ...

Nicholas Owen: Have you had anything approaching an apology from Israel at any level from the Foreign Minister himself for example over this incident?

David Miliband: No ... The Foreign Minister explained to me that in the Israeli system the Foreign Ministry does not, is not answerable, or is not accountable for their external intelligence and the way that it is in the UK system. ...

Nicholas Owen: And just going back to this point about, you know, relations with Israel very important and we all know about the concerns about Iran and so, but to expel a diplomat of a friendly country, that's a very, very unusual event isn't it?

David Miliband: It is an unusual event, but frankly so is the taking of twelve British identities and using them in this way.

To read the full transcript see

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=Speech&id=21944955>

United Nations

Palestinian institution-building efforts continue despite challenges, UN seminar told

Despite challenging political and economic circumstances, Palestinian efforts towards reform, institution-building and development have continued with the aim of eventually establishing a Palestinian State, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today. "It is vital that the Palestinian Authority (PA) continue to advance this State-building agenda while striving to meet its other Roadmap obligations in full, including an end to incitement against Israel," Mr. Ban said in a message delivered on his behalf at the opening in Vienna of a United Nations seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people. The Palestinian reform efforts have contributed to a 6.8 per cent increase in gross domestic product (GDP) in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=34180&Cr=palestin&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>

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>

Third Reading House of Lords

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100323-0003.htm#10032376000529>

includes definition of "religion or belief"

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100323-0003.htm#10032376000505>

House of Lords amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/096/2010096.pdf>

Explanatory Notes on Lords amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmbills/096/en/201096en.pdf>

Flood and Water Management Bill

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

**** Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (Controlled Activity and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2010**

Grand Committee

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/100323-gc0004.htm#100323114000062>

Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/prosecutionoffencesact1985amendment.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

**** closes in 2 days**

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>

Revised Guidance on Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education (England and Wales only) (closes 15 June 2010)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1671&external=no&menu=1>

Continuing need for a controlled activity category in the Vetting and Barring Scheme (England and Wales only) (closes 17 June 2010)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1710&external=no&menu=1>

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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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charity SCO29438