

Political Affairs Brief

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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UK Parliamentary Questions

Higher Education: Anti-Semitism

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what progress has been made by his Department on the continuance of the higher education sub-group of the cross-Government working group on anti-Semitism; what discussions he has had since July with members of the Jewish community about this group; and if he will make a statement. [R] [14350]

Mr Willetts: I have had no discussions since July on this issue but I am due to meet with representatives of the Jewish community and the HE sector to discuss the work of the BIS Anti-Semitism and HE Group.

There is no place for racism of any form, including anti-Semitism, in higher education, whether on campus or in student unions. Universities have access to a strong legislative framework and guidance to help them deal effectively with instances of intolerance, racism and harassment in their institutions. Government would expect them to vigorously tackle these issues when they arise and has supported institutions with key guidance on promoting good campus relations in the sector.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100913/text/100913w0008.htm#10091415000015>

Churches: Repairs and Maintenance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent representations he has received on the continuation of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [14085]

John Penrose: This Department has received a wide range of representations from individuals, congregations and faith groups about the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme. I appreciate that the scheme is well liked and has played a significant role in supporting repairs to places of worship, and I can fully understand their desire for certainty over the scheme's future to be given at the earliest opportunity. This decision can only be taken, however, as part of the wider discussions about Government spending priorities in the next spending round. We will ensure that we publicise any decisions as soon as possible.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100913/text/100913w0002.htm#10091329000006>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

John Hemming (716) Religious marriage ceremonies in the UK - That this House notes the provisions of the Marriage Act 1949 and the Marriage Act (Scotland) 1977; further notes that these two Acts create a differential standard of recognition for religious ceremonies within the UK whereby a couple in Scotland under the relevant Act may be married by a celebrant with an accepted connection to a particular faith or belief under the provisions of section 12 of that Act, which has no equivalent in the 1949 Act; further notes that unless a marriage ceremony takes place within a certified place of meeting for religious worship an additional civil service is required to solemnise a marriage and that these provisions of both Acts can have the effect of discriminating against minority religions, including but not restricted to those of a pagan belief, whose certifiable places of worship are few and whose religious leaders are not covered by the provisions of the 1949 Act; further notes the conclusions of a 2002 report Civil Registration: Vital Change which called for officiators of a marriage, not premises, to be licensed and for an approved list to be drawn up; and calls for the adoption of this proposal and the amendment of the appropriate Acts.

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=41676&SESSION=905>

Communities and Local Government

2008-09 Citizenship Survey: Race, Religion and Equalities Topic Report

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/citizenshipsurvey200809/equality>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Prime Minister offers a "very warm welcome" to Pope Benedict XVI

Prime Minister David Cameron has offered Pope Benedict XVI a "very warm welcome" to Britain ahead of his "incredibly important and historic visit". ... The Prime Minister said: "This is the first ever Official Papal Visit to these shores. And it's a great honour for our country. These will be a very special four days not just for our six million Catholics but for many people of faith right across Britain, and millions more watching around the world." Pope Benedict XVI will visit the UK as Head of State of the Vatican and as the leader of a major denomination.

To read the full press release see

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=22859061>

Papal visit will strengthen ties between UK and Holy See

... Lord Patten, the Prime Minister's Representative for the Papal visit, and Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, highlighted the historic nature of the visit and its significance for many countries around the world. Lord Patten emphasised that the visit will be an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen ties between the UK and the Holy See and to enhance global action on poverty reduction and climate change.

Archbishop Nichols said his two main aims for the visit are to invite society to consider faith in God "a gift to be discovered afresh" and to heighten the level of cooperation between the British Government and the Holy See. He acknowledged differences in opinion between the two parties but underlined that there are many areas in which cooperation can deepen. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=22859790>

To read the transcript of the press conference see

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=Speech&id=22859132>

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Holocaust

Scottish Government

Learning about the Holocaust

Pupils from across Scotland will travel to Poland today to learn at first-hand about the horrors of the Holocaust. They will visit the death camp at Auschwitz, where 9,000 people were killed each day at the height of the exterminations, and take part in a memorial service.

The Scottish Government is helping to fund the trip, run by the Holocaust Educational Trust, and the 130 pupils from 65 schools on Tuesday's flight will be accompanied by Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning Keith Brown.

Mr Brown said: "The lessons from the Holocaust should never be forgotten. Curriculum for Excellence seeks to create responsible citizens and this trip is an excellent example of schools putting that into practice. I'm privileged to be joining these young people on this visit. Visiting those places where the Nazis perpetrated their crimes provides pupils with a memorable and personal insight into the terrible events of the Holocaust, which they can then share with their peers when they return to school.

The Learning from Auschwitz project is run by the Holocaust Educational Trust. Over two years, four trips to Auschwitz are being run and every Scottish secondary school will have the opportunity to send two senior pupils on the trip. The Scottish Government is providing funding of £214,000.

During the trip, pupils visit pre-war Jewish sites in the Polish town of Oswiecim before travelling to Auschwitz to see remnants of barracks, crematoria and gas chambers. A memorial service is held where the pupils light memorial candles and place them around the remains of the destroyed Crematoria II.

Pupils later take part in a follow-up seminar back in Scotland and then design and implement projects so that they can share their experiences back at school.

The number of Jews killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust is approximately six million, including around 90 per cent of Polish Jews. In total 11 million people were exterminated.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2010/09/13110012>

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Israel

UK Parliamentary Questions

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the shooting of four residents in the Beit Hagai settlement near Hebron on 31 August 2010; and if he will make a statement. [14257]

Alistair Burt: Four Israelis were killed in an attack on 31 August 2010. The military wing of Hamas has claimed responsibility.

We condemn such despicable acts of terrorism which must not be allowed to derail the talks. We call on all parties to refrain from any activity that could undermine the search for a just and lasting settlement.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the shooting of two civilians at Rimonim Junction, east of Ramallah, in September 2010; and if he will make a statement. [14259]

Alistair Burt: Two Israelis were wounded on the West Bank in an attack on their car on 1 September. The military wing of Hamas has claimed responsibility. This followed an attack on 31 August in which four Israelis were killed.

We condemn such despicable acts of terrorism which must not be allowed to

derail the talks. We call on all parties to refrain from any activity that could undermine the search for a just and lasting settlement.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of raids by Egyptian police on weapons depots in Sinai on 28 and 29 August 2010; and if he will make a statement. [R] [14261]

Alistair Burt: The UK remains in close touch with the Egyptian authorities on a range of security issues, and are aware of recent press reports about the discovery of an estimated 300 anti-aircraft missiles and over 100 kg of explosives in Sinai allegedly destined for Gaza. Together with the international community, the UK is working hard to help prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza as well as easing access restrictions for humanitarian and reconstruction relief.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100913/text/100913w0002.htm#10091323000020>

Hezbollah

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the establishment of facilities in Syria for the production of missiles to be supplied to Hezbollah; what reports he has received on the source of funding for the facility; and if he will make a statement. [13521]

Alistair Burt: We are aware of reports of Syrian facilitation of missiles to Hizballah. I raised my concern with Syrian Foreign Minister Muallem during my visit to the region in July.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received reports on the transfer of weapons from Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon, with particular reference to Scud missile transfers. [13523]

Alistair Burt: We are concerned by recent reports of weapons transfers to Hezbollah, including Israel's concerns that Scud missiles have been transferred. During my recent visit to Lebanon I raised the issue with Prime Minister Hariri and underlined the importance of implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which calls for the disarmament of all armed groups.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what (a) reports of and (b) representations on the recent blog post by HM Ambassador to Lebanon on the death of the late Sheikh Fadlallah he has received; whether he has taken any steps in consequence; whether he has discussed the matter with his counterparts in (i) Israel, (ii) Lebanon, (iii) Egypt and (iv) the United States; and if he will make a statement. [13525]

Alistair Burt: The ambassador expressed a personal view on Sayyed Fadlallah, describing the man as she knew him. The blog did not fully reflect Government policy and has since been removed.

The blog received widespread commentary, getting coverage in both the UK and the region, with a range of reactions.

The Lebanese Foreign Minister raised the matter with me during my recent visit to Lebanon in July.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the present locations of Hezbollah military capability in Lebanon, with particular reference to infrastructure located alongside civilian installations. [13526]

Alistair Burt: We are concerned by Hezbollah's own claims that it possesses significant military capabilities. We assess that since the end of the 2006 Lebanon conflict Hezbollah has replenished its holdings of both short and long range rockets and missiles.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the capacity of the UNIFIL mission to fulfil its mandate in respect of asserting the return of the effective authority of the government of Lebanon (a) south and (b) north of the Litani River, with particular reference to monitoring Hezbollah military activity. [13527]

Alistair Burt: UN Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL) plays a vital and positive role in maintaining peace and security in southern Lebanon. However it faces a number of challenges in working to achieve this. These have recently been underlined by the attacks on UNIFIL peacekeepers south of the Litani river in early July and increased tensions on the Israel/Lebanon border.

The UK supported recent press comments by the Security Council condemning the July attacks on UNIFIL peacekeepers, and calling for UNIFIL's security to be respected so that it can fulfil its mandate.

I also discussed these points with the Lebanese Government, during my visit to the region on 13-14 July. We continue to support UNIFIL, and to press for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

I should note that UNIFIL does not have a mandate for action north of the Litani river.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the comments of HM Ambassador to Lebanon on the death of the late Sheikh Fadlallah represent a change in British policy towards Hezbollah; and if he will make a statement. [13799]

Alistair Burt: No, the ambassador's comments expressed a personal view and do not represent a change in our policy on Hezbollah.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100913/text/100913w0001.htm#10091323000011>

Trades Union Congress

Speech by ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow

... the ITUC gave special attention to the terrible plight of Palestinian workers. We adopted a detailed policy which will guide our work, and we also developed a programme of work with the PGFTU and the Histadrut - ably assisted by the TUC.

Over the next few months, I will be giving special attention to that programme: dealing with the rights of Palestinian workers in the illegal settlements; arranging a high level trade union delegation to the Middle East, and most importantly developing a joint political declaration with both the PGFTU and Histadrut. ...

http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-18487-f0.cfm

United Nations

The Human Rights Council opens 15th session

The Human Rights Council, the principal UN intergovernmental body responsible for human rights, opened its 15th session in Geneva which runs from 13 September to 1 October.

In a speech to the Council, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stressed the "pressing need" for human rights protection "both in emergencies and chronic human rights situations." ... She pointed out that in some countries, "peaceful dissidents, human rights advocates, lawyers, and press representatives have been targeted and violently attacked" and "ad hoc laws or other restrictive measures" have been used to curtail "civil society's scope of action and social activism." ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/HRClopens15thsession.aspx>

Reports:

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on follow-up to the report of the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/15session/A.HRC.15.52.pdf>

Report of the Committee of independent experts in international humanitarian and human rights laws to monitor and assess any domestic, legal or other proceedings undertaken by both the Government of Israel and the Palestinian side, in light of GA resolution 64/254 including the independence, effectiveness, genuineness of these investigations and their conformity with international standards

Not yet online

Report of the Committee of independent experts in international humanitarian and human rights laws to monitor and assess any domestic, legal or other proceedings undertaken by both the Government of Israel and the Palestinian side, in light of GA resolution 64/254 including the independence, effectiveness, genuineness of these investigations and their conformity with international standards

Not yet online

Note from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/157/27/PDF/G1015727.pdf?OpenElement>

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Foreign Affairs

UK Parliamentary Question

France: Anti-Semitism

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on incidents of anti-Semitism in France since July 2010; and if he will make a statement. [14258]

Mr Lidington: On 6 September 2010 French Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux stated that there had been 47 actions and 190 threats of anti-Semitism recorded for the first three months of 2010. The Minister reiterated the French Government's condemnation of any act of anti-Semitism. We do not have more recent statistics.

The Government condemn anti-Semitism and all forms of racism.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100913/text/100913w0001.htm#10091323000010>

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Relevant Legislation ** New or updated

UK Parliament

Daylight Saving Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/daylightsaving.html>

Face Coverings (Regulation) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/facecoveringsregulation.html>

**** Fixed Term Parliaments Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/fixedtermparliaments.html>

Second Reading, House of Commons

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100913/debtext/100913-0002.htm#1009131500001>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/064/amend/pbc0641309a.153.html>

**** Identity Documents Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/identitydocuments.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/001/amend/pbc0011309a.145-149.html>

**** Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/parliamentaryvotingsystemandconstituencies.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/063/amend/pbc0631309a.151-152.html>

Scottish Parliament

End of Life Assistance Bill

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

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Consultations

** new or updated

**** closes in 6 days**

Policing in the 21st century: reconnecting police and the people

(closes 20 September 2010)

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/consultations/policing-21st-century/>

Taking action on rights, support and protection of victims of crime and violence

(closes 30 September 2010)

http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/consulting_public/news_consulting_0053_en.htm

Data protection legislative framework (closes 6 October 2010)

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/dpa-call-evidence-02-07-2010.pdf>

General Medical Council (GMC) Equality Scheme 2011 – 2014 (closes 15 October 2010)

https://gmc.e-consultation.net/econsult/consultation_Dtl.aspx?consult_id=140&status=2&criteria=

Guidance on Concessionary Schemes for Surface Water Drainage Charges

Applies in England only (closes 22 October 2010)

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/surface-charges/index.htm>

Consultation on the change to policy direction for the Big Lottery Fund (closes 29 October 2010)

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/consultations/7313.aspx>

Equality Act 2010: The public sector Equality Duty: Promoting equality through transparency (closing date 10 November 2010)

http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/402461_GEO_EqualityAct2010ThePublicSectorEqualityDuty_acc.pdf

**** Equality Duty: Detailed Proposals - Consultation on Public Sector Equality Duty
Draft Regulations and Order (Scotland) (closes 26 November 2010)**

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/324431/0104438.pdf>

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