

Political Affairs Brief

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

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Downing Street

PM urges Israel to do everything possible to avoid repeat of unacceptable situation

Prime Minister David Cameron spoke last night with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A spokesman for the Prime Minister said: "The Prime Minister deplored the heavy loss of life off the coast of Gaza earlier today. He reiterated the UK's strong commitment to Israel's security, but urged Israel to respond constructively to legitimate criticism of its actions, and to do everything possible to avoid a repeat of this unacceptable situation. The PM also stressed the importance of urgently lifting the blockade of Gaza, and allowing full access for humanitarian aid."

<http://ukinisrael.fco.gov.uk/en/news/?view=News&id=22303850>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Foreign Secretary: restrictions on Gaza must be lifted

The Foreign Secretary spoke again today of the need for the international community to work together to find a solution to end the restrictions on Gaza. The Foreign Secretary William Hague, stressed however that any way forward had to be implemented whilst "insur[ing] that there is such access to Gaza while not access for the smuggling in of weapons in to Gaza."

In an interview with BBC News, the Foreign Secretary said: "There is clearly a strong united international demand for this to be done, for UN Security Council Resolution 1860 to be implemented, allowing access for aid and indeed access for commercial goods in to Gaza. I think that the strength of that demand is greater than ever before. We will all have to work together to find the mechanisms that allow that to happen, to ensure that there is such access to Gaza while not access for the smuggling in of weapons in to Gaza. So, should Israel expect us all to come up with ideas about that, to try to find mechanisms for that, yes. But the important thing, above all, is that they lift the restrictions that are counterproductive from Israel's point of view, that are not contributing to Israel's security, but quite probably damaging her long term security. So I think today they face a stronger international demand for that than they have ever faced."

The Foreign Secretary confirmed yesterday that British consular officials in Israel are in touch with all British nationals who are currently in detention. The Foreign Office understands that Israel plans to deport all activists today and already has consular staff at airports in Israel and Turkey to assist British Nationals when they arrive. The Foreign Office is in constant contact with the Israeli authorities on the situation of all British nationals currently detained.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=22311805>

Scottish Parliament Motions

S3M-6471 Christine Grahame: Supermarket Boycott of Israeli Produce—That the Parliament supports calls for peaceful direct action to be taken against the state of Israel for what is considered its ongoing flagrant disregard for international law and failure to uphold international standards of behaviour in its efforts to destabilise the entire Middle East region through its actions and policies; supports calls for a complete withdrawal of Israeli produce from Tesco, Asda, the Co-operative, Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's, Somerfield and Waitrose and considers that Scots consumers can make a real difference by refusing to purchase Israeli produce from these UK-based companies, and calls on those supermarket chains to refuse to buy produce from Israel until it has demonstrated its commitment to peace and the rule of law.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/business/motions/Default.aspx?motionid=19179>

S3M-6448 Joe FitzPatrick: Freedom Flotilla—That the Parliament condemns the actions of the Israeli Government that, in what is considered to be in violation of international law, ordered the boarding of the freedom flotilla in international waters leading to the deaths of at least nine human rights activists; notes that among the 600 passengers detained is Dundee man Ali El-Awaisi, who was delivering humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza that included 13 pallets full of medicine, clothes, toys and building materials, worth around £30,000, donated by the people of Dundee; welcomes the donations given by the Fire Brigade Union, Tayside for Justice in Palestine, Friends of Al-Aqsa, Yusuf Youth Initiative and all the mosques in Tayside and all others who contributed, and calls for the immediate release of Ali El-Awaisi and all members of the freedom flotilla and an end to the blockade of Gaza.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/business/motions/Default.aspx?motionid=19156>

S3M-6441 Sandra White: Tragic Deaths Aboard Humanitarian Convoy—That the Parliament condemns in the strongest possible terms the attack by the Israeli navy on the freedom flotilla, a convoy of boats with over 600 passengers including 28 Britons and 10 MEPs carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza in an attempt to break what is widely considered the illegal blockade of Gaza, which has led to a number of deaths; considers that the attack occurred in international waters in clear contravention of international maritime law; believes that, regardless of viewpoints on the Israeli-Palestinian situation, such actions perpetrated against the international community and in clear defiance of international law are indefensible, and calls on the UK Government and the European Union to take appropriate actions including the consideration of sanctions.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/business/motions/Default.aspx?motionid=19149>

Northern Ireland Assembly

Gaza: Attack on Flotilla

Mr McCartney: ... I express Sinn Féin's sympathy to those murdered and injured by Israeli paratroopers on the freedom flotilla yesterday and our solidarity with the Irish people being held in custody by the Israeli Government. We condemn the assault on the flotilla, which was bringing humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza. We echo the call from the United Nations to have a prompt and impartial inquiry. In those circumstances, and because of the Israeli record, the inquiry must have an international dimension to underwrite and guarantee its impartiality. ...

The modus operandi and location of the attack by the Israelis in international waters shows a total disregard of all acceptable standards of international rule of law and for any diplomatic or humanitarian efforts to break the siege imposed on the people of Gaza. ... human rights and peace activists and people of international repute have taken to land, convoys and, in the latest attempt, to the seas to make the beleaguered people of Gaza understand that they have international support to ensure that the conditions that they live under will finally be broken. That is the context in which the Israelis stormed the ships in international waters. That is why many people are standing in protest right across the

world and why many countries are calling their Israeli ambassadors to their Governments to ensure that, for once, Israel will start to listen to international opinion. ...

I hope that ... the Assembly sends a strong message that Israel's record on the violation of rights of the Palestinian people, when held up to scrutiny, is a matter of disrepute.

Mr Bell: I reinforce my party's solidarity with the state of Israel. That state has been under systematic terrorist attack since its conception. The Member opposite does not realise the shame that some Israeli children have to go to schools that are three minutes away from an air raid shelter because they will have to dash into those shelters on several occasions through the day. I am disappointed that the House did not make a statement about the Katyusha rockets that were used to murder Jewish Israeli children. There was no statement in the House, no message of support and no condemnation of Hamas, who wish to drive the Jews into the sea. Nothing was mentioned in the House about the attack and murder of innocent Israeli children on their way to school. There was no statement and no condemnation from this House: the hypocrisy is rank.

Sadly, the circumstances are that members of Hamas still believe it is correct to drive the Jews into the sea. There still exists the Nazi mentality to slaughter all Jews and take away the state of Israel. That will never happen. There are those who are determined to inflict pain and injury on the innocents of Israel. Israel provided a way forward whereby any humanitarian could enter the country, as could aid. That aid would be searched, dealt with appropriately from there and delivered. However, those circumstances had to be avoided. Why? The reality, whether we wish to face up to it or not, is that there are those who are still determined to smuggle guns, bombs, Katyusha rockets and everything else to attack the state of Israel, to murder Israeli schoolchildren and to attempt to destroy a sovereign state. ... As a Christian, I deprecate any loss of life, but I wish to make it absolutely clear that the state of Israel has a right to defend itself against attack and will do so.

Mr Kennedy: ... Yesterday's incident highlights the underlying need to find a solution to the complex issues at stake in the Middle East. ... Given our experience of terrorism and how it was dealt with in Northern Ireland, I think that a section of the unionist population have more than a sneaking regard for the manner in which the Israeli Government defends Israel and puts its security considerations above all others. However, international obligations must be met and accepted. ...

Mr McDevitt: ... We should all stand in solidarity with the ordinary civilians who live in fear on both sides of the border between Palestine and Israel, with those who live in fear of attack from Hamas or the Israel Defense Forces, and with those who live under permanent arrest and are prisoners in their own land. We must remember that we are discussing this tragedy this morning because Irish and British men and women are now prisoners and are at the fate of the Israeli state, which has a questionable record of human rights, after being seized in international waters that were outside the boundaries of that state. ...

Dr Farry: ... It is important to recognise that it is a breach of international law. The international community does not recognise Israel's control over Gaza or the West Bank. ... Any blockade of Gaza is, therefore, a breach of international law. ... That said, in the wider context, it is important that we acknowledge that the situation is far from black and white. There are flaws on both sides, and wrongs have been committed on both sides. There is an appalling humanitarian situation in Gaza, in particular, but also in the West Bank. We must also acknowledge that there have been ongoing attacks from Hamas against the Israeli population including civilians, which have led to Israel feeling the need to make an overly security-focused response. I respect Israel's right to exist as a state and recognise that Israel feels very isolated and alone internationally. However, it is important that we help Israel to acknowledge that the only sustainable way forward lies in negotiating a two-state solution with the Palestinian people. We must also put pressure on the Palestinians to formally recognise Israel's right to exist as a state. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2009/100601.htm#b>

TUC

TUC condemns attack on Gaza aid flotilla

Commenting on reports of the Israeli military attack on Gaza aid ships early this morning, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said:

'The TUC is shocked and dismayed by the loss of life and injuries caused by this attack. Violence is no solution to the problems of the region. The TUC sends its deepest condolences to the families of the dead and its hopes for a full recovery for the injured on both sides. From the reports we have received, the TUC believes that the Israeli military's actions, which we understand took place in international waters, were disproportionate. A full, open and independent enquiry must be carried out into these events.

"The TUC has pressed consistently for a peaceful two-state solution to the conflict in the Middle East, which can only be undermined by this action. We reiterate our view that the blockade of Gaza must be lifted unconditionally to enable the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza. We believe that the international community now needs to take action to end the blockade.'

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-18003-f0.cfm>

STUC

STUC condemns Gaza Relief attack deaths by Israeli forces

In condemning the killing of innocent civilians by Israeli forces on board relief ships en route to Gaza, Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) General Secretary Grahame Smith said "We are shocked and appalled at the news of the deaths of relief volunteers at the hands of Israeli forces. There can be no defence for this act of inexcusable brutality. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of those who lost their lives.

"The worldwide condemnation of these unprovoked actions has once again focused attention on the blockade of Gaza which has caused starvation and the deprivation of medical and other essential supplies desperately needed by the Palestinian people. Those who lost their lives add to the already long list of those innocents who have perished as a consequence of the Israeli Government's blockade of Gaza.

"The Scottish Trades Union Congress will continue its call for boycotts and disinvestment in Israeli companies, and loudly reiterate its call for sanctions against the state of Israel because of the state's failure to comply with international laws and agreed principles of human rights.

<http://www.stuc.org.uk/news/755/stuc-condemns-gaza-relief-attack-deaths-by-israeli-forces>

European Parliament

Humanitarian convoy: MEPs condemn Israeli commando operation

Israel's Tzahal commando operation against a humanitarian convoy was almost unanimously condemned by the Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday, in a debate in Brussels with the Israeli Ambassador and a Council representative. MEPs called for an impartial international inquiry into the operation and urged Israel to end the Gaza blockade. Some said the EU/Israel association agreement should be suspended. ...

To read the full press release see

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/030-75417-152-06-23-903-20100601IPR75416-01-06-2010-2010-false/default_en.htm

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Human Rights Council holds urgent debate

The Human Rights Council at its meeting in Geneva has adopted a resolution deciding to “dispatch an independent international fact finding mission to investigate violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law resulting from the Israeli attacks on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance”. The President of the Council will appoint the members of the mission who will be required to report back at the September meeting of the Council.

The resolution called on Israel “to immediately lift the siege on occupied Gaza and other occupied Territories” and condemned “in the strongest terms possible the outrageous attack by the Israeli forces against the humanitarian flotilla of ships”. The Council adopted the resolution following an urgent debate on the military operation during its 14th session.

Speaking on behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Deputy High Commissioner, Kyung-wha Kang noted at the outset of the debate that while details of the incident are still emerging, the operation against the flotilla had taken place in international waters. “In light of the tragic outcome, it seems apparent that the Israeli military was highly excessive in its use of force, and we must question why force should have been used at all in such a situation.” Recalling that the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner had stressed the need for a full investigation into the incident, Kang emphasized, “any investigation must meet relevant international standards. It must be prompt, impartial, credible and independent.” ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/HRC Holds Urgent Debate.aspx>

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Relevant Legislation ** New or updated

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

ACPOS Draft Hate Crime Guidance Manual (closes 11 June 2010)

http://www.scojec.org/consultations/current/10vi_acpos_draft_hate_crime_manual.doc

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)

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

Amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 (closes 15 July 2010)
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2010-pathogens-toxins/consultation-paper2835.pdf?view=Binary>

Welsh Assembly Review of Standing Orders (closes 16 July 2010)
http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-bc-home/bus-committees-third-bc-comm/bc3_inq_so.htm

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