

Political Affairs Brief

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

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UK Parliamentary Questions

Israel and Palestine: West Bank

Baroness Tonge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to the Government of Israel's decision to end the settlement freeze in the West Bank.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): My Lords, the Foreign Secretary made clear on 27 September our disappointment that the settlement construction moratorium in the West Bank has not been renewed. We view settlements as illegal and as an obstacle to peace. We remain very concerned that peace talks could falter, and the Foreign Secretary has repeatedly-most recently yesterday, on 6 October-called on the Israeli Government to resolve this issue. Officials last discussed this with the Israelis on 6 October.

Baroness Tonge: My Lords, is the Minister aware that 62 per cent of the West Bank, including most of the Jordan valley, is now totally under Israeli control; that, despite the so-called settlement freeze, building has continued in some West Bank settlements during the summer; and that the annexation of east Jerusalem-if you have been there, you know-is taking place at breathtaking speed? Does the Minister agree that actions clearly are speaking louder than words, and that it is now time to put real pressure on the Israeli Government by implementing Liberal Democrat policy to persuade the European Union to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement until Israel obeys international law?

Lord Howell of Guildford: My noble friend puts the situation sadly accurately and with great passion, and I agree with much of her feeling about this. We regard the EU association agreement as a continuing platform on which we can discuss this issue and many others with Israel; but I assure her that there is no question of upgrading the wider EU-Israel relationship until there is substantial progress towards a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict-in the middle of which stands the obstacle of the illegal settlements that we are talking about. I understand and sympathise with what the noble Baroness says, but we must keep the association agreement in place as a means of getting the necessary message through to the Israelis.

Lord Howe of Aberavon: Will the Minister confirm that one important provision of the Balfour Declaration was the need for the Jewish settlements to take full account of the presence and rights of the Palestinian population? The difficulty of achieving that has been enhanced by the scale of persecution by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, but does it not follow from that that respect for the settlement freeze is of fundamental and ever increasing importance?

Lord Howell of Guildford: My noble and learned friend, as we would expect, is entirely right: this is a central issue. However, confronting it are the apparent religious arguments of the settlers, who insist that they have some sort of historical right to build. Until the matter is resolved along the lines that my noble and learned friend rightly suggests, we will be in difficulties. We continue to press on this issue with the utmost vigour.

Lord Grocott: Given the welcome reminder to the House by the noble Lord, Lord McNally, of the commitment of William Hague-and, I am sure, of the noble Lord, Lord Howell-to the importance of human rights and, indeed, universal human rights, is it not almost impossible to imagine a worse violation of one's human rights than having one's country illegally occupied for more than 40 years and for that occupation to be not just static but developed all the time through the continuation of illegal settlements? Surely the time has come for more concerted international action to ensure that the human rights of the Palestinians go some way to being properly recognised.

Lord Howell of Guildford: I hope very much, as I think must everyone, that that time has come and that some kind of solution can be reached. As I am sure the noble Lord appreciates-it hardly needs saying-the other side of the issue is the security of the people of Israel, who want to live in peace, and that has to be balanced against the need to move on from this ghastly blockade and the difficulty represented by the Occupied Territories. Therefore, there are problems that we cannot wish away but what the noble Lord says is of course the right way forward.

Lord Elystan-Morgan: Does the noble Lord agree that, while many in this House and outside accept and applaud the Government's attitude towards the illegal settlements, equally anathematic to the prospect of peace between Israel and its neighbours is the fact that rockets continue to be pumped into the cities and towns of southern Israel, each with the desire and hope that it will bring death and destruction?

Lord Howell of Guildford: The noble Lord puts the issue very clearly. There are the two sides. There is the question of the security of Israel and attacks on Israel, and there is Hamas, which some people urge should somehow be brought into the talks, but the question is: should it be when it is continuing provocative rocket attacks against Israel? Once Hamas takes immediate and concrete steps towards quartet principles, the matter might look different, and perhaps once it unconditionally releases Mr Gilad Shalit, ends interference with the operation of aid agencies in Gaza and ceases its rocket attacks, we might look at the matter differently. However, until then, the noble Lord's point is very valid.

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: My Lords, I am sure that we on these Benches share the views that the Minister has put forward about ending the settlement freeze. However, the Foreign Secretary made another very interesting speech at the UN on 23 September, when he advocated a wider role for the UN, not only in peacekeeping but peacebuilding. I thought that that broke new ground. Do the Government have any plans to advocate the use of UN peacekeepers and peacebuilders in the West Bank?

Lord Howell of Guildford: I cannot give the noble Baroness a specific answer to that question but that indicates the trend of our thinking. Our intention is to mobilise more UN activity, just as we want to use our membership of the EU, our own bilateral contacts, our position in the quartet and indeed the role of former Prime Minister Mr Blair. All those are instruments through which pressure can be mounted. However, the noble Baroness will have to await a more specific answer.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101007-0001.htm#10100714000812>

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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/fixdtermparliaments.html>

Identity Documents Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/identitydocuments.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/psc0631007a.205-211.html>

Scottish Parliament

**** Certification of Death Bill**

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/58-CertDeath/index.htm>

Bill as introduced

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/58-CertDeath/b58s3-introd.pdf>

Explanatory Notes

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/58-CertDeath/b58s3-introd-en.pdf>

Policy Memorandum

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/58-CertDeath/b58s3-introd-pm.pdf>

Scottish Government press release

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2010/10/08112926>

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 7 days**

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>

Charity Commission: Proposed withdrawal of paper forms for Annual Returns, Registration applications, and forthcoming Charitable Incorporated Organisations (closes 2 December 2010)

http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/About_us/About_the_Commission/ols_consultation_intro.aspx

Equality Act 2010 - Performance of the Public Sector Equality Duties in Wales (closes 17 December 2010)

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/equality/equalityact2010/?lang=en>

Equality and Human Rights Commission: Draft Code of Practice on Further and Higher Education (closes 31 December 2010)

http://live.ehrc.precedenthost.co.uk/cgi-bin/generate.pl?page_id= sx0666i4b&save=screen

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