

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

Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006: Convictions

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been (a) charged and (b) convicted under the provisions of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. [16847]

The Solicitor-General: The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006, which came into force on 1 October 2007, inserted into Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 offences relating to stirring up hatred against persons on religious grounds. Prosecutions for this offence require the consent of the Attorney-General.

Since 1 October 2007 only one person has been charged with any offence of stirring up religious hatred, and that person (Anthony Bamber) was acquitted on 21 June 2010.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101014/text/101014w0002.htm#10101423000116>

Religious Tolerance

Lord Sheikh: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps will they take to maintain tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs in British society.[HL1851]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Baroness Hanham): Faith communities make a vital contribution to national life: guiding the moral outlook of many, inspiring great numbers of people to public service, providing succour to those in need.

Britain has a proud tradition of religious tolerance, within the law. The Government are committed to creating a strong and integrated society in which hatred and prejudice are not tolerated and in which all people are free to express their identity and live without fear of harassment and crime that targets them because of that identity.

The Government welcomes and supports the growth of dialogue and shared action between different religious groups. We want to help build effective, friendly working relationships between people of different faiths.

Inter Faith Week 2010, from 21 to 27 November, will be an important focus for inter faith activities. Despite tight spending pressures, we are able to make some funds available to support activities during the week.

We have also decided to continue with the Faiths in Action scheme-grants of up to £6,000 to support innovative local inter faith projects, including during Inter Faith Week. This Government have approved 179 projects totalling £995,000. Many of these have an emphasis on people from different backgrounds coming together to

address local problems such as improving green spaces, as well as promoting tolerance and respect.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101014w0001.htm#10101422000154>

UK Ministerial Statement

Updating the Coroner System

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Jonathan Djanogly):
... we plan to bring forward some of the measures from part 1 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. ...

Commencing provisions enabling operational problems facing coroners to be addressed.

Reviewing and updating the coroners rules.

Issuing and monitoring best practice guidance, including a national charter for bereaved families.

Maintaining and improving training for coroners and their officers.

Encouraging the further establishment of support services provided by the voluntary sector to those attending inquests.

We will make it simpler for coroners to transfer cases between each other, for the convenience of bereaved families and to reduce delays. We will also make it possible for post-mortem and related examinations to take place at the most appropriate specialist centre, by removing the geographical restrictions of the Coroners Act 1988.

We aim to commence these measures in line with the original deadline of April 2012. Some may be brought in earlier than that.

We will continue to work across Government to identify whether and how we can implement other measures in the 2009 Act. We will continue to work closely with Health Ministers to implement proposed new death certification measures so causes of death are recorded more accurately, public health measures are improved, and any improper practices by doctors are detected. In doing so, we will take account of the responses to the consultation paper "Reform of the Coroner System Next Stage: Preparing for Implementation". I have today published the Government's response to that paper, and have placed a copy in the Libraries of both Houses.

However, after careful consideration, we have decided that in the current economic climate we cannot go ahead with plans to implement national leadership from a Chief Coroner, an appeals system, or a medical adviser. We have proposed that the abolition of the office of the Chief Coroner should be included in the Public Bodies Bill, which was announced earlier today and we are further considering the transfer of some of the Chief Coroner's functions to suitable alternative bodies. ...

We will continue to work collaboratively with coroners, local government and police authorities to deliver service improvements. We will also explore with voluntary sector organisations how we can work together better, so as to provide further support for people when they suffer a sudden or unexpected bereavement.

We believe that our proposals will deliver an improved and more flexible service to bereaved families and also to coroners, their staff and others who work within or have an interest in the coronial system. ...

To read the full text of the statement see

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101014/wmstext/101014m0001.htm#10101430000023>

Reform of the Coroner System Next Stage: Preparing for Implementation – Government response

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/docs/reform-of-coroner-system.pdf>

Downing Street

New structure charts give insight into organisation of Government

The Government has published new details about civil servants working at the heart of government as part of its ongoing drive to make the Government more accountable.

- Today departments have published for the first time structure charts setting out details of the number and grade of staff working in different teams.
- The structure charts show:
- The names, job title and salary for all senior civil servants at director level and above
- The job title of all senior civil servants at deputy director level, along with the number of staff in their team and the breakdown of their grades.

For links to charts showing the structure of each UK Government Department see

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/topstorynews/2010/10/new-structure-charts-give-insight-into-organisation-of-government-55666>

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

National Lottery to be reformed

... from 2012 the original good causes will once again receive the 20 per cent share of the total, as set out when the Lottery was created in 1994.

John Penrose said: "... the founding vision – that it should primarily benefit the arts, sport, heritage and the voluntary sector with funding for projects that would not otherwise get off the ground – got lost along the way. Today I am putting that right." Mr Penrose also pledged that funding for the voluntary and community sector – key players in the Government's plans to create a Big Society – will be protected [and] rise from current levels of around £564 million a year to more than £630 million a year by 2013 ...

To read the full press release see

http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/news_stories/7490.aspx

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Israel

UK Parliamentary Questions

Israel: Illegal Settlers

Lord Wright of Richmond: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the Government of Israel's continued refusal to remove illegal settlers from the West Bank and East Jerusalem; and what action the European Union is taking to help resolve this problem.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): My Lords, all settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is illegal and represents an obstacle to peace. We have consistently pressed Israel to renew its settlement moratorium and are very disappointed that it has not yet done so. My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary delivered this message to Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman on 27 September and reiterated it on 6 October. The European Council also set this out in its statement on 16 September.

Lord Wright of Richmond: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that as of June this year up to 200 housing units were under construction that started construction while the so-called moratorium was in place? They add to the 2,000 building

units that started before the moratorium and continued right through it to this day. Does the Minister recall that in 1982, after the Israelis invaded Lebanon, the Conservative Administration, of which he was a member, imposed a ban on all British arms to Israel until the invasion was reversed? Will he consider with our European partners a similar ban on an EU-wide basis until a genuine moratorium is put in place and the Israeli Government start to remove illegal settlers from the West Bank and East Jerusalem?

Lord Howell of Guildford: I totally share the noble Lord's correct frustration and dismay that the building activity has gone on even during the moratorium and is probably continuing at this moment in a highly provocative way. We regard that as illegal.

As to embargoes and export restrictions, we take the view that the total isolation of Israel would be a backward, not forward, step in this painful process. We fully agree that pressure must be mobilised. As far as an arms embargo is concerned, we have very tight, rigorous and effective consolidated EU and national export licensing criteria, which we employ. These work very effectively. As the noble Lord indicated, any further ban on development would have to be not merely EU-wide but virtually worldwide. We think that the isolation route is not the right one except, of course, for the crucial issues that I mentioned that are under very tight licensing control.

Lord Janner of Braunstone: Does the noble Lord accept that Israel is the only democracy in that area and, like our own, it does not always elect a Government with whom we agree? Some of us do not agree with our present Government in some matters and that is certainly the view of those on this side of the House. Does the noble Lord agree that the EU should keep working with the quartet and the US to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to make peace through negotiations and that reprimanding either side is counterproductive to producing the result which we all would like to see?

Lord Howell of Guildford: On the general proposition, obviously, yes, we desperately want to see peace between Israel and Palestine and we want to see the negotiations resumed and continued. But where we are asked to use our good offices and where we want to bring influence to bear, it seems perfectly reasonable to point out in what the noble Lord calls a reprimand that certain actions taken by either side may be going the wrong way. One thing that is going the wrong way is provocative settlements continuing in occupied territories, which must be setting these negotiations back. That is a reasonable proposition to put forward even to those who recognise fully the needs and the right of Israel to secure its proper security.

The Lord Bishop of Chester: My Lords, at what point does the extent of the settlement activity, particularly in the West Bank, render the two-state solution an impractical aim?

Lord Howell of Guildford: Behind the right reverend Prelate's question is a fear which I and many share. There could come a point when there is so much building and intrusion that it cannot even be contemplated as part of the swap of lands or anything else in a final negotiation. This reinforces our determination to bring to bear on the Israelis the necessity of continuing the moratorium on new building and to realise that in the eventual negotiation settlement this matter has got to be reasonably settled so that there can be a viable Palestinian state.

Baroness Miller of Hendon: Does any assessment made by the Government take into account the fact that these settlements provide a haven from which Hezbollah and Hamas cannot continually throw bombs and things across into Israel, as has happened since Israel gave up control in Gaza?

Lord Howell of Guildford: There are security dangers in all these developments. Obviously, attacks on Israel from Hezbollah and from rocketing from Hamas in Gaza are matters that make it more difficult for the negotiations to go ahead. These two are deplorable developments and they must cease if we are to make progress.

Lord Lea of Crondall: Does the Minister agree with the point being put to our friends in the Israeli Government that public opinion in this country and much of western Europe is

influenced by the fact that there were two sides to the Balfour declaration? One is creating a homeland for the Jewish people and the other is observing the rights of the Palestinian people.

Lord Howell of Guildford: My noble friend is urging short answers, so the answer is yes, of course there are two sides.

Lord Pannick: My Lords, does the Minister agree that a more fundamental obstacle to a peace settlement than the settlements in the West Bank, which occupy some 5 per cent or so of that territory, is the failure of Arab states to introduce into their own countries the rule of law and the right to freedom of expression which would promote a real debate in those countries about the true interests of the unfortunate Palestinian people?

Lord Howell of Guildford: The noble Lord is of course right that the issue of settlements is difficult. It is not the only issue and there are many broader considerations on which he has quite correctly touched.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101014-0001.htm#10101424000803>

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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>

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/psc0631410a.373-376.html>

Scottish Parliament

Certification of Death Bill

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

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 today**

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=

**** closes in 7 days**

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

Certification of Death (Scotland) Bill (closes 18 November 2010)

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/hs/inquiries/CertificationOfDeathBill/CallForEvidence.htm>

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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