

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

Anti-Semitism

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he has taken to reduce the incidence of anti-Semitism since his appointment; what such steps he plans to take in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [17335]

Andrew Stunell: The Department of Communities and Local Government chairs the cross-Government working group to tackle anti-Semitism and plans to publish a three-year progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the All Party Inquiry into anti-Semitism in December 2010. The cross-Government working group will continue to meet over the next 12 months to tackle anti-Semitism and any other issues of concern to the Jewish community.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Jewish community on reducing the incidence of anti-Semitism; and if he will make a statement. [17368]

Andrew Stunell: I met representatives of the Community Security Trust in September 2010 where the issue of reducing the incidence of anti-Semitism was discussed. I also attended the All Party Parliamentary Group on Anti-Semitism breakfast in May 2010 where issues concerning the Jewish community were discussed.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/text/101018w0003.htm#10101831000012>

VAT: Churches

Nicky Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the future of the Listed Places of Worship Grant scheme. [16923]

John Penrose: I have been asked to reply.

The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme makes grants equivalent to the VAT incurred in making repairs to listed buildings in primary use as places of worship. The future of the scheme will be determined during the forthcoming spending review.

Nicky Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims were made under the Listed Places of Worship Grant scheme (a) in each region, (b) in respect of each religious denomination and (c) for each purpose in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [16924]

John Penrose: The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme makes grants equivalent to the VAT incurred in making repairs to listed buildings in primary use

as places of worship.

(a) The number of claims and total value by region in 2009-10 are in the following table. ... [see link below]

(b) Figures for the number of claims and total value by denomination or faith group in 2009-10 are in the following table. ... [see link below]

(c) Grants are made in respect of the full range of building repairs, associated professional fees, and repairs to clocks, pews, bells and organs. It is not possible to provide figures for each classification of works. From January 2011 until April 2011, grants will not be available for professional fees or repairs to fixtures and fittings due to the need to make in-year financial savings. Plans for the period after April 2011 will be announced in the Spending Review later this week.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/text/101018w0005.htm#1010199000039>

Religious Buildings: Construction

Mr Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what planning guidance his Department issues on the construction of places of worship in residential areas. [16706]

Robert Neill: We have issued no planning guidance specific to the construction of places of worship in residential areas. Planning Policy Statement 1 'Delivering Sustainable Development' does state, however, that planning authorities should build a clear understanding of the make-up, interests and needs of the community and any interest groups in their areas, some of which may relate to particular values or religion. All these groups should be encouraged to participate in the plan-making process. If a proposal for a new place of worship is made, the application should be decided in the light of policies in the local development framework and any other material consideration.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/text/101018w0004.htm#10101831000046>

Home Office

Strategic Defence and Security Review

http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191634.pdf

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Israel

UK Parliamentary Questions

EU External Trade: Israel

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the answer to the then hon. Member for Milton Keynes South West of 18 March 2010, Official Report, column 1022W, on EU external trade: Israel, how many (a) cosmetic companies and (b) importers were targeted for checks; what the nature of the checks was; what documentation was required and from whom; whether the investigations have been completed; and whether any mislabelling has been detected. [16675]

Mr Gauke: For reasons of commercial confidentiality HMRC is unable to say how many cosmetic companies and importers were targeted for checks. However, it has undertaken checks in respect of a range of cosmetic products imported from Israel. So far, two duty demands have been issued in 2010 where the accompanying proof of preferential origin showed that the goods were produced in

a settlement. HMRC will continue to make regular checks on imports from Israel which receive preference under the EU-Israel agreement. However, the majority of cosmetic products attract a free rate of customs duty outside of any preferential tariff arrangement.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the contribution of the former Exchequer Secretary on 27 January 2010, Official Report, column 320WH, whether he has yet received a copy of the reports of the fact-finding mission of the European Commission to Israel and Palestine in 2009. [16676]

Mr Gauke: HMRC has not received copies of reports of the fact finding missions to Israel and Palestine in 2009. However, it understands that in April 2010 the EU Commission provided an EU Council Working Group with a brief oral report of its findings in which it concluded that the 2005 Technical Arrangement is working satisfactorily.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the answer to the then hon. Member for Milton Keynes South West of 18 March 2010, Official Report, column 1022W, on EU external trade: Israel, what progress HM Revenue and Customs has made in checking exports made under the EU-Israel Agreement from settlement companies listed in the 2009 research paper prepared by the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. [16683]

Mr Gauke: HMRC has examined customs import declarations from all companies mentioned in the research paper. There were no imports from a number of the companies. For some of the companies that did export goods to the UK, the proofs of preferential origin covering goods indicated that the goods were produced in Israel. HMRC is returning the proofs concerned to the Israeli authorities for verification of the origin of the goods. HMRC has already issued duty demands for goods imported from four of the companies in the paper whose goods have been established as originating in a settlements location.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the answer to the then hon. Member for Milton Keynes South West of 10 March 2010, Official Report, column 676W, on Israel: EU external trade, whether the consignment with commodity code 34013000 is still under investigation; and whether HM Revenue and Customs has received confirmation of its place of production. [16684]

Mr Gauke: Goods covered by commodity code 34013000 are under investigation. HMRC asked the Israeli authorities in September 2010 to verify the origin of three consignments of the products concerned. A response is awaited.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the contribution of the former Exchequer Secretary of 27 January 2010, Official Report, column 321WH, how many importers have been issued a financial penalty since the entry into force of the new civil penalty provision for persistent claims of preference outside entitlements; what guidance has been issued on the frequency of false preference claims outside entitlements which constitute persistent submission; whether HM Revenue and Customs is recording the false declarations made by each importer which they have detected; and what the policy of HM Revenue and Customs is on checking the imports of importers who have previously made claims outside preference entitlements. [16685]

Mr Gauke: HMRC has published on its website a schedule, taken from the Customs (Contravention of a relevant rule) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, of those situations in which an importer may incur a financial penalty. It supplements the guidance in HMRC Notice 301 on civil penalties in the customs area.

HMRC also keeps records of false declarations made by importers in respect of the preferential origin of goods. It is HMRC's policy to regularly examine the customs import entries of those importers who have previously made invalid declarations. Demands are issued for the full rate of customs duty, where appropriate. HMRC is unable to extract specific information in respect of the number of warning letters and penalty notices issued in respect of the new penalty provision, which came into force in December 2009 for the persistent presentation of invalid proofs of preferential origin.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the contribution of the former Exchequer Secretary of 27 January 2010, Official Report, column 320WH, which supermarkets HM Revenue and Customs has contacted to explore potential discrepancies between settlement origin identified by the supermarket's internal tracking system and the customs imports declaration. [16686]

Mr Gauke: For reasons of commercial confidentiality, HMRC cannot disclose its dealings with specific UK companies. However, it continues to experience traceability problems as a result of intermediaries rather than supermarkets being shown as importers on customs import declarations. HMRC therefore supports the work of DEFRA in encouraging supermarkets, under voluntary labelling arrangements, to ensure that their suppliers correctly mark the origin of the produce originating in the settlements. This will help HMRC to identify such products at the time of importation.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the contribution of the former Exchequer Secretary of 27 January 2010, Official Report, column 321WH, what changes HM Revenue and Customs plans to make to the 2005 technical arrangements to ensure compliance with the rules on claims for preference. [16687]

Mr Gauke: The 2005 Technical Arrangement was concluded in the EU-Israel Customs Co-operation Committee by the EU Commission acting on behalf of the European Union as a whole. Consequently, the UK cannot take unilateral action to amend its terms. However, HMRC will continue to immediately refuse, under the arrangement, claims to Israeli tariff preference where a settlements location is shown on the accompanying proof of origin. It will also continue to return proofs to the Israeli authorities for verification where it has doubts about the origin of the goods concerned.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to the contribution of the former Exchequer Secretary of 27 January 2010, Official Report, column 320WH, what steps the European Commission has taken in response to the HM Revenue and Customs request for correct compliance by the Israeli authorities in respect of the precise place of production on the proof of preferential origin. [16688]

Mr Gauke: The European Commission continues to monitor the correct operation by Israel of the 2005 Technical Arrangement. It periodically asks member states for information and concerns in respect of the operation of the arrangement. In the last year only the UK has raised concerns about the possibility that the place of production shown on the proof of origin is simply a head office or distribution centre in Israel, and that the goods concerned may have in fact originated in a settlement. HMRC does not have any information about the Commission's current plans for any bilateral contacts with the Israeli authorities.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/text/101018w0005.htm#101019900011>

Israel: Military Aid

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the (a) export of components for F-16 aircraft and Apache helicopters (i) to Israel and (ii) to the US for incorporation in military equipment to be supplied to Israel and (b) other military exports to Israel. [17431]

Alistair Burt: All export licence applications for the export of military equipment to Israel are assessed on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. Further details about UK military exports to Israel and all other destinations are available in the UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/text/101018w0003.htm#10101829000054>

Israel: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

James Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress of Israel's application to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [16678]

Alistair Burt: We can confirm Israel joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in May 2010.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with reference to the answer to the then Member for Milton Keynes South West of 18 March 2010, Official Report, column 973W, on the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and Development: Israel, what further progress has been made in resolving the outstanding issues relating to the scope of statistical data provided by the Israeli authorities to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and Development. [16720]

Alistair Burt: Israeli accession to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OECD) does not demonstrate an acceptance of illegal settlements or stand in the way of Palestinian statehood. Israel put forward statistics which include areas which are deemed by the UK and the wider international community to be occupied territory. However, the OECD Secretariat have included the following footnote regarding Israeli data in all pre- and post-accession reports that use Israeli data. The UK worked to agree this with EU and OECD partners in order to ensure clarity on the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

"This report/review/document is not intended to cover the territories known as the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. However, for technical reasons, it uses Israel's official statistics, which include data relating to the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, and Israeli settlements in the West Bank. It is without prejudice to positions regarding those territories, which most members of the international community regard as occupied territory under the terms of international law."

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/text/101018w0003.htm#10101829000055>

Palestinians: International Assistance

James Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the economic situation in the Gaza Strip. [16679]

Mr Duncan: I have been asked to reply.

There are several recent reports on the economic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), but none specifically on Gaza. These include reports produced by the World Bank, IMF and Palestinian Authority for the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting of the donor support group to the Palestinian Authority, held in September.

The World Bank report 'The Underpinnings of the Future Palestinian State: Sustainable Growth and Institutions' is available at: www.worldbank.org on the west bank and Gaza page.

The IMF report 'Macroeconomic and Fiscal Framework for the West Bank and Gaza: Sixth Review of Progress' is available at: www.imf.org on the west bank and Gaza page.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics also produces regular reports on various aspects of the economy in the OPTs, such as employment figures and activity of various sectors, which are available on their website at: www.pcbs.gov.ps

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/text/101018w0003.htm#10101829000056>

Israel and Palestine

Lord Dykes: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will make representations to the Government of Israel regarding the early release of Palestinian detainees held in their prisons without due process.[HL2234]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): The UK will continue to monitor the situation with regard to all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons. We call on the Israeli Government to take immediate action to ensure that all cases are reviewed by a court in accordance with fair procedures and that detainees' rights are upheld.

All Palestinian prisoners should have access to a fair trial, and Israel should ensure that it acts always in accordance with international law. We shall continue to raise our concerns with the Israeli authorities and issue statements when appropriate.

Additionally our officials started attending military court hearings in 2009. Since then, following a UK suggestion, an EU rotating team has been set up to send three EU diplomats to all hearings in human rights defender cases; the UK continues to attend more regularly than other member states.

Lord Dykes: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will make representations at international fora regarding the Government of Israel's alleged breaches of international law in relation to Palestinian rights in East Jerusalem.[HL2235]

Lord Howell of Guildford: We will continue to raise with the Israeli Government our concerns about Israeli policies in Jerusalem, which threaten to cut off East Jerusalem from the West Bank. Those policies include the routing of the barrier on occupied territory, settlement activity both within and around east Jerusalem, residency rights for East Jerusalemites and increasingly restricted access to Jerusalem for Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza.

The UK has a strong record of lobbying hard on issues relating to house demolitions and settlement building. We see the situation in East Jerusalem as extremely sensitive because we view east Jerusalem fundamentally as we see the rest of the Occupied Territories. Any attempts to change the facts on the ground are therefore contrary to international law and prejudicial to the peace process itself, as well as causing unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and causing tensions. We strongly supported the statement of 30 June by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton to this effect.

We discuss these issues with our European partners and within the appropriate UN bodies.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101018w0001.htm#1010188000775>

Gaza

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government how they plan to help restore the imports and exports of Gaza to their pre-May 2007 levels.[HL2217]

Baroness Verma: The UK is working with other members of the international community with the objective of securing full access for aid, aid workers, reconstruction materials and other permitted imports to Gaza, and relaxation of restrictions on exports and the movement of people.

We have worked closely with key international partners including the United Nations (UN) and Office of the Quartet Representative (OQR) in pressing for full implementation of the measures to relax movement and access announced by Israel on 20 June, including through the provision of practical support to the OQR and the UN. Our funding to the UN Access Co-ordination Unit, which works with the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and aid agencies, is helping to facilitate the transfer of goods into Gaza. We have also been working with the PA to address vital issues related to its role in co-ordination of crossing points and entry of goods into Gaza.

More widely, we have encouraged international partners, including the OQR, UN and World Bank, to develop robust reporting and analysis of the situation in Gaza, along with a comprehensive plan for the revival of Gaza's legal economy. We have raised directly with the Israeli Government on a number of occasions the need to allow exports from Gaza and the free movement of people.

Baroness Tonge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what reports they have received from the quartet concerning the permitted imports of building materials required for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's reconstruction projects in Gaza.[HL2319]

Baroness Verma: The quartet does not issue such reports. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) reports that they have secured approval from the Israeli Government to build eight of the 30 schools they estimate are needed, but have not yet received clearance to import all the necessary construction materials. UNRWA has recently been notified that approval for three of the eight schools has been withdrawn due to undisclosed problems with their locations. UNRWA is working with the Israeli authorities to resolve this issue.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101018w0001.htm#1010188000765>

United Nations

UN and partners may hold high-level meeting over Israeli-Palestinian impasse

The United Nations and its diplomatic partners in the search for Middle East peace may hold a high-level meeting soon to try to revive direct Israeli-Palestinian talks that stalled after Israel did not renew a partial settlement moratorium, a senior official said today. ... Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has indicated he will not continue with negotiations unless Israel freezes settlement activity. ...

"We have a brief and crucial window to overcome the current impasse," [Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco] said. "Intensive diplomatic efforts led by the United States and supported by all members of the Quartet are ongoing to create conditions conducive to the continuation of the negotiations." ...

In an overview of the past month, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco said the Palestinian Authority continues to advance in its State-building agenda, with critical achievements in public finance reform, infrastructure and the provision of social services. It has also made efforts to provide security in areas under its authority to meet its Road Map commitments to combat terrorist activity, reportedly thwarting attempts by militants to launch attacks.

Despite these efforts, Israeli security forces, citing security concerns, conducted 353 operations in the West Bank during the reporting period, in which 6 Palestinians were killed, including two Hamas militants allegedly involved in the killing of four Israelis near Hebron in August. Also, 157 Palestinians were injured and 330 arrested.

"Incursions on this scale weaken efforts to build genuine security cooperation," the UN official said.

Forty-four violent incidents were recorded between local Palestinians and settlers, in which 6 Palestinians and 4 Israelis were injured. Hundreds of olive trees are reported to have been set on fire, poisoned or uprooted by settlers throughout the West Bank in the run-up to the harvest. There were renewed confrontations in sensitive areas of East Jerusalem, underscoring tensions due to the presence and expansion of settler communities in Palestinian neighbourhoods.

"Much more needs to be done by Israel to prevent violence by extremists against Palestinian civilians under occupation, and to impose the rule of law," Mr. Fernandez-Taranco told the Council. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=36481&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

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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>

Human Rights Committee Report

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201011/jtselect/jtrights/36/36.pdf>

Second Reading, House of Lords

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101018-0001.htm#1010186000503>

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

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

Committee Stage, House of Commons

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101018/debtext/101018-0001.htm#1010184000001>

Proceedings

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/063/pro0631810p.61-67.html>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmbills/063/amend/pbc0631910m.427-433.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 in 3 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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