

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

Russia: Middle East Peace Process

Lord Dykes: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will seek a stronger participation by the government of Russia in the efforts of the quartet on the Middle East to secure a two-state solution.[HL3972]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): As one of the four members of the quartet on the Middle East, Russia is already a strong participant in the Middle East peace process (MEPP). My right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the MEPP with various interlocutors during his visit to Russia on 12 and 13 October. We see the quartet as an important actor for co-ordinating the international community's efforts to achieve a two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101125w0001.htm#10112535000544>

Israel

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the Government of Israel concerning the arrest of Mr Mahmoud Ramhi, the Secretary-General of the Palestinian National Council, on 9 November; and whether they will ascertain his present status and whereabouts. [HL4009]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We are aware of reports regarding the detainment of Mr Mahmoud Ramhi. We continue to 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 people's rights, particularly the rights to a fair trial and family visitation, are upheld.

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Verma on 1 November (WA 358), whether they have obtained assurances from the Government of Israel concerning (a) equitable access to water supplies in the West Bank, (b) water purification in Gaza, and (c) sewage treatment in Gaza; and, if not, what further representations they will make.[HL4362]

Baroness Verma: The Government have received no assurances from the Government of Israel on these matters. UK officials regularly discuss these issues with Israeli counterparts and we continue to call for the full implementation of the relaxation of access restrictions for Gaza that Israel announced in June, and for further easing of restrictions on movement and access in the West Bank.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101125w0001.htm#10112535000528>

Israel and Palestine

Baroness Tonge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Government of Israel regarding the arrest of the Secretary-General of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Dr Mahmoud al-Ramahi.[HL4186]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We are aware of reports regarding the detainment of Mr Mahmoud al-Ramhi. We continue to 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 their rights, particularly the rights to a fair trial and family visitation, are upheld.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101125w0001.htm#10112535000529>

Palestine

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government, in view of the recent inter-party agreement on the voting system, whether they will press for the earliest possible elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council. [HL4117]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): The UK would like to see Palestinian Legislative Council elections taking place as soon as possible. However, we fully understand President Abbas's decision to delay the elections until they can be held throughout the Palestinian territories, including Gaza. Hamas has refused to allow free and fair elections to take place in Gaza. The onus is now clearly on Hamas to support the democratic process.

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will discuss with the Government of Israel the need of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for cement, aggregate, steel and glass; why in mid-September only 1.7 per cent of required imported materials had been approved; and whether they will ask all states that contribute to the budget of the agency to make similar representations to Israel. [HL4119]

Baroness Verma: The Government are concerned that the UN Relief and Works Agency is experiencing difficulties securing approvals and materials for reconstruction projects. My right honourable friend the Minister of State for International Development raised this with Israeli Ministers during his recent visit to the region, and pressed Israel to fully implement measures they announced in June to ease movement and access restrictions on Gaza. The UK is also funding a United Nations team to work with the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, UN agencies and NGOs to facilitate the transfer of humanitarian goods, including construction materials, into Gaza.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101125w0001.htm#10112535000538>

Gaza

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have made representations to the Government of Israel for the full opening of the Karni crossing, so as to reduce the chance of a shortage of wheat in Gaza and allow in supplies for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.[HL4069]

Baroness Verma: My right honourable friend the Minister of State for International Development raised the issue of Gaza access with Israeli Ministers during his recent visit to the region. He pressed for full implementation of the measures announced in June to ease movement and access restrictions. In August, senior officials from the Department for International Development (DfID) discussed the capacity of crossings into Gaza, including that of Karni, with General Dangot, the Co-ordinator for Government Activities in the Territories. We co-ordinate closely with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) over Gaza and will continue to support its representations to the Israeli authorities as necessary, while recognising Israel's legitimate security concerns about the Karni crossing.

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will discuss with the Government of Israel the need to increase the number of patients from Gaza who are permitted to go to the West Bank and Israel for urgent major medical treatments.[HL4118]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We, along with our international allies, believe that it is not only imperative for goods and exports to leave Gaza, but that it should also be possible for people, particularly those needing medical treatment, and others to move freely in and out of Gaza.

The UK raises a number of human rights issues, on a regular basis, with the Israeli authorities at ministerial and official level. We will continue to follow up on these issues.

Baroness Tonge: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the Government of Israel regarding the importation of spare parts for the water treatment and supply system in Gaza. [HL4185]

Baroness Verma: The UK has not made any specific representations to the Government of Israel on the importation of spare parts for the water and sanitation network in Gaza. We continue to work closely with the Office of the Quartet Representative, UN agencies and other partners to support improvements in access to Gaza for items for approved reconstruction projects, and all items not on the Government of Israel's list of prohibited imports.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101125w0001.htm#10112535000521>

UK Ministerial Statement

General Affairs Council/Foreign Affairs Council

... Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) - Gaza/Lebanon

Over lunch, Ministers focused on the efforts to encourage Israel and the Palestinians to restart direct talks. Many speakers emphasised the need for the EU to support the US' efforts. There was also concern about continuing settlement activity, particularly in East Jerusalem. Baroness Ashton said that it was important to maintain momentum to improve conditions in Gaza, reiterating the EU's readiness to contribute to this. She added that the EU would continue to work with the international quartet. On Lebanon, a number of Ministers argued that the EU should support the special tribunal. Conclusions were agreed. ...

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm101125/wmstext/101125m0001.htm#10112524000008>

United Nations

Ban calls on Israelis and Palestinians to show courage needed to make peace

The United Nations today marked the [International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People](#) with a challenge from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to both Israelis and Palestinians to show the statesmanship and political courage needed to reach peace. He noted that there was little optimism on either side that peace could be achieved soon, let alone within the one year target date set by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when they resumed direct talks in September, and he reiterated his calls to Israel to freeze settlement activity and to the Palestinians to fight terrorism and curb incitement. ...

He commended steps taken during the past year to improve conditions on the ground but said much more is needed. "The Palestinian Authority must continue to roll out the institutions of statehood, combat terrorist attacks and curb incitement," he urged.

“Meanwhile, it is both Israel’s interest and its duty to begin rolling back the measures of occupation, particularly with respect to movement, access and security actions.”...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=36891&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

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Foreign Affairs

UK Parliamentary Question

Minorities in the Middle East

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will adopt a comprehensive approach to the effective protection of religious, ethnic and cultural minorities in the Middle East; and whether they will make representations to members of the Arab League and the Conference of Islamic States to do the same.[HL4201]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): The Government have a comprehensive policy on the protection of religious, ethnic and cultural minorities, but as both circumstances and contexts differ across the Middle East region and around the world, our embassies and teams apply that policy in ways that will be most effective in and most appropriate to the societies and cultures in which they work.

Our missions overseas are responsible for monitoring, and raising, human rights in their host countries and routinely raise concerns with host Governments, including freedom of religion or belief where this is appropriate. Our embassies take action, where possible, on individual cases where persecution or discrimination occurs and lobby for changes in discriminatory practices and laws where these exist.

We raise these matters, and will continue to do so, in bilateral and EU human rights dialogues and at all other appropriate opportunities. We will also continue our work in the UN, and with other international organisations, to uphold universal standards.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/101125w0001.htm#10112535000532>

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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/ld201011/ldbills/026/amend/am026-f.htm>

and

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldbills/026/amend/ml026-i.htm>

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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Other Relevant Information

Faith Matters

The English Defence League

<http://faith-matters.org/images/stories/fm-reports/english-defense-league-report.pdf>

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Consultations

**** new or updated**

**** closes tomorrow**

The Future of the Citizenship Survey (closing date 30 November 2010)

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1756366.pdf>

**** closes in 3 days**

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](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/About%20us/About%20the%20Commission/ols%20consultation_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

Charity Commission for England and Wales: Views on Future Strategy

(closes 14 January 2011)

http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/RSS/News/pr_strategic_review.aspx

Improvements to Criminal Justice Statistics (closing date 18 February 2011)

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/statistics-cp171110.htm>

National statistics, published by the Department of Health about the experience of black and minority ethnic patients

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Consultations/Liveconsultations/DH_121762

Prevent Review (closing date not stated)

<http://preventreview.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

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