

Political Affairs Digest

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

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House of Commons Oral Answer

Business of the House

James Berry: ... In my speech on the Christmas Adjournment last year, I raised the need for social media companies to take responsibility for addressing hate speech and extremism on their platforms, rather than leaving it to the police to do their dirty work at the taxpayer's expense. As there has been no real improvement from social media companies, may we have a debate on how to make them face up to their responsibilities?

Mr Lidington: I cannot offer an immediate debate in Government time, but it strikes me that this would be an extremely appropriate subject for debate under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee or in Westminster Hall. My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and most of us in this place are pretty sickened by the racist, vicious, misogynistic and anti-Semitic material that is sent to our constituents and, frankly, is often used to intimidate Members of this House, too. It is a practice that needs to stop, and I hope that the internet companies will live up to their corporate responsibilities.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-02-23/debates/10044AA3-849B-4A79-A83B-E325771CB375/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-03CA75D2-1587-4470-9F13-1AB640817A03>

House of Commons Written Answer

Judaism: Festivals and Special Occasions

Craig Williams [63566] To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, what plans the Government has to mark Hanukkah in 2017.

Marcus Jones: The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has been proud to celebrate religious festivities and significant dates with our faith communities for many years. Our usual practice is to issue a celebratory message, alongside the Prime Minister, and attend community events where feasible. Downing Street and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office mark faith events throughout the year by holding receptions for faith leaders, dignitaries, international guests and community representatives, which DCLG Ministers attend. We will, in partnership with Downing Street and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, consider our detailed plans for Hanukkah later in the year.

[Israel](#)

House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinian Authority

Ian Austin [64352] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when her Department will make its next assessment of the Palestinian Authority's compliance with the Partnership Principles set out in the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and the Palestinian Authority.

Rory Stewart: The UK is currently undertaking its assessment of the Palestinian Authority's commitment to the Partnership Principles. These assessments provide robust analysis of countries' commitments to these principles and are used to inform dialogue between DFID and partner governments.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-20/64352/>

Palestinians: EU Aid

Ian Austin [64353] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, which body audits the PEGASE scheme; and which regulatory authority supervises those auditors.

Rory Stewart: The PEGASE scheme is audited by two firms. Ernst & Young are providing the ex-ante audits. The firm is authorised and regulated by the UK Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). Mazars, Paris (with their local partner El Wafa) are conducting ex-post audits. Mazars are regulated by Ordre des Experts Comptables – Région Paris Ile de France.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-20/64353/>

Palestinians: EU Aid

Ian Austin [64354] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether PEGASE uses a dedicated bank account to pay salaries to West Bank civil servants.

Rory Stewart: The PEGASE system uses a dedicated sub-account within the PA's Single Treasury Account. The UK has a further sub-account to pay the salaries of West Bank health and education public servants. The PA payroll is checked by independent auditors, and UK payments made to all eligible beneficiaries are traced through the verification process.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-20/64354/>

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Ian Austin [64614] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the findings of the Overseas Development Institute report entitled Evaluative review of the Statebuilding Grant and the Palestinian Government Facility - DFID Palestinian programme, published by her Department in November 2015, that increased employment by the Palestinian Authority combined with its policies of paying salaries to convicted terrorists while they are in prison, and holding public sector jobs open for them until they are released from prison, appear to have promoted terrorism in the period from 1998 to 2011.

Rory Stewart: The ODI report identified important progress that has been made in supporting the fiscal stability of the Palestinian Authority, and made clear that DFID support was instrumental in reducing the chances of economic collapse of the Palestinian economy and violent escalation. The ODI report did not find, conclude or suggest that “paying salaries to convicted terrorists while they are in prison, and holding public sector jobs open for them until they are released from prison, appear[s] to have promoted terrorism in the period from 1998 to 2011” – this is misrepresentation of the research, its analysis and findings. The report made practical suggestions about how DFID could further improve its impact, which were taken into account in the design of the new programme of support to the PA.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-20/64614/>

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Ian Austin [64650] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with reference to her announcement of 16 December 2017 on future UK support to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, whether the Government plans no longer to provide funds to the Palestinian Authority to pay salaries of (a) any Gaza public servants or (b) such servants who are unable to work.

Rory Stewart: UK aid to the Palestinian Authority now only goes to the salaries of Palestinian Authority health and education public servants in the West Bank all of whom are able to work. No payments are made to Gaza public servants. These changes provide better value for money, with British taxpayers' money able to deliver more essential services and have a bigger impact on the ground for Palestinians.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-20/64650/>

The announcement referred to above (correct date 16 December 2016) can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/future-uk-support-to-the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

European Parliament

Israel-Palestine: MEPs express their concerns about peace process

... While in Jerusalem and the West Bank on 20-24 February, the [cross-party delegation of MEPs](#) met Palestinian Authority officials, communities at risk of forced displacement and civil society organisations battling Israel's settlement expansion. This June marks half a century of Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

Speaking in Jerusalem on 23 February, delegation chair Neoklis Sylikiotis, a Cypriot member of the GUE/NGL group, described Israel's recent decision to build 3,000 new settler homes in the West Bank and to retroactively legalise thousands of illegal settlements as “a new violation of the rights of Palestinians to self-determination”.

Members visited the Ofer military court, Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem and the Khan al-Ahmar Bedouin community which is set to be demolished by Israeli authorities. ...

In meetings with Palestinian Authority officials, MEPs urged the implementation of the new Palestinian unity deal reached in January ... [the five MEPs were denied access to Gaza](#) by Israeli authorities. ...

During a [plenary debate on 14 February](#), members also discussed recent developments in the Middle East peace process, including the retroactive legalisation of Israeli settlements. Speaking on behalf of Malta's presidency of the EU Council, Minister Ian Borg reiterated the EU's commitment to a two-state solution, namely Israel and Palestine existing side by side as separate states. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170219STO63224/israel-palestine-meps-express-their-concerns-about-peace-process>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Press briefing note on Israel: Elor Azaria case

"We are deeply disturbed at the lenient sentence given by the Tel Aviv Military Court earlier this week to an Israeli soldier convicted of unlawfully killing a wounded Palestinian in an apparent extrajudicial execution of an unarmed man who clearly posed no imminent threat.

Sergeant Elor Azaria was convicted of manslaughter in January 2017 for shooting dead Abdelfattah al-Sharif in Hebron in March 2016. At the time, Mr. Al-Sharif was unarmed and lying wounded on the ground after having been shot for stabbing and wounding an Israeli soldier. Although manslaughter carries a maximum punishment of 20 years, Sergeant Azaria was sentenced only to 18 months in prison and a demotion.

More than 200 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli security forces since the most recent upsurge in violence began in the West Bank in September 2015. Sergeant Azaria is the only member of the Israeli security forces to have been brought to trial for such a killing.

While the prosecution and conviction are very welcome steps towards accountability, the punishment - which is excessively lenient - is difficult to reconcile with the intentional killing of an unarmed and prone individual. It also stands in contrast to the sentences handed down by other Israeli courts for other less serious offences, notably the sentencing of Palestinian children to more than three years' imprisonment for throwing stones at cars. This case risks undermining confidence in the justice system and reinforcing the culture of impunity."

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21221&LangID=E>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/arbitrationandmediationservicesequality.html>

Assisted Dying Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/assisteddying.html>

**** Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/culturalpropertyarmedconflicts.html>

Royal Assent

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2017-02-23/debates/59B52EC3-48C5-4B82-A2A1-EDBBD429C8B9/RoyalAssent>

Lobbying (Transparency) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/lobbyingtransparency.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

Promotion of Israeli-Palestinian Peace (United Kingdom Participation)

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/promotionofisraelipalestinianpeaceunitedkingdomparticipation.html>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes in 3 days**

Racism at work (closing date 27 February 2017)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/RacismAtWork>

Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation: increasing numbers of successful donations (Scotland) (closing date 14 March 2017)

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00511160.pdf>

The UK's policy towards the Middle East Peace Process (closing date 30 March 2017)

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news-parliament-2015/middle-east-peace-process-inquiry-16-17/>

Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill (closing date 10 April 2017)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/adoption-and-children-northern-ireland-bill>

Workplace Diversity (Wales) (closing date not stated)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/wtucdiversity>

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