

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 Written Answers

Community Security Trust: Grants

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [2455] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether her Department plans to maintain at the same level or increase the annual grant to the Community Security Trust.

Ben Wallace: Yes. Careful consideration will be given to the funding level for the grant in future years.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-03/2455/>

Universities: Hate Crime

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [2454] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance her Department has published on preventing speakers intending to incite hate being given a platform on university campuses.

Joseph Johnson: Universities are required to balance their freedom of speech duty alongside other legal responsibilities, such as laws against different types of speech that can incite hatred. This includes the statutory Prevent duty. The government has published statutory guidance on Prevent (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>) explaining that universities are required to consider the impact and mitigations needed to host a particular speaker and whether their views constitute extremist views and risk drawing people into terrorism.

The sector takes these issues seriously and has produced a variety of helpful guidance for hosting speakers. This includes the Universities UK guidance: *Freedom of speech on campus*

(<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2011/freedom-of-speech-on-campus.pdf>)

and *External speakers in higher education institutions*

(<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2013/external-speakers-in-higher-education-institutions.pdf>).

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-03/2454/>

Race Relations: Education

Anna Turley (Labour) [3605] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what information her Department holds on how many schools teach anti-racism education; and what assessment her Department has made of the quality of that education.

Nick Gibb: We do not hold data on how many schools teach anti-racism education. Every school is different and each school will face its own challenges. Schools have the autonomy to tailor their approach to tackling these issues and to take action according to their individual requirements.

The Equality Act introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty. Under this duty, state funded schools must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and none.

The National Curriculum also provides many opportunities to raise awareness of racial and religious diversity and tolerance.

Teaching about racism and discrimination can be included as part of the statutory programme of study for citizenship education at ages 11-16 in maintained schools. Citizenship education should include the development of pupils' understanding of the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.

Schools are also free to teach about racism in personal, social, health, economic (PSHE) education, where pupils can reflect on and challenge notions of prejudice. Schools are already expected to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and, as part of this, fundamental British values, including the values of mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. This is at the heart of their responsibility to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-06/3605/>

Child Benefit: Minority Groups

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [2456] To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to introduce a special circumstance dispensation for people from religious minorities in relation to the payment of child benefit for a third or subsequent child.

Elizabeth Truss: The exceptions to the policy to limit support to a maximum of two children in Child Tax Credit were debated by the UK Parliament during the passage of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. The government's view is that the exceptions legislated for in Child Tax Credit cover the circumstances where parents or carers are not in the same position to make choices about the number of children in their family as others are, or who are fulfilling an important social function in providing homes for children who cannot be looked after by their own parents.

Claimants will still be entitled to an additional amount in Child Tax Credit in respect of any disabled children, regardless of the total number of children in the household. Child Benefit will also continue to be paid regardless of family size, as the basis of the government's contribution towards the cost of bringing up a child.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-03/2456/>

House of Commons Library

Briefing: Abuse and intimidation of candidates and the public in UK elections

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2017-0138/CDP-2017-0138.pdf>

Charity Commission

Trust and confidence in the Charity Commission

Report

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/624848/Trust_and_confidence_in_the_Charity_Commission_2017.pdf

Infographic

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/624849/Trust_and_confidence_in_the_Charity_Commission_2017_infographic.pdf

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Israel

House of Commons Oral Answers

Illegal Settlements: Occupied Palestinian Territories

9. Tommy Sheppard (SNP): What steps he is taking to encourage the Israeli authorities to stop the building of illegal settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territories. [900346]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): We regularly raise these issues with Israel, calling for a reversal of the policy of settlement expansion. I reiterated that in the House of Commons last week, and recently both the Foreign Secretary and I have made statements strongly condemning proposals for new settlement expansion in both the west bank and East Jerusalem.

Tommy Sheppard: Only last week, the right-wing Israeli Government announced a further expansion of the illegal settlement programme, so it is clear that whatever action the British Government are taking it is not working. Is it not therefore time that Her Majesty's Government gave a more robust response to this problem, including by discouraging investment in and trade with the illegal settlements, and ensuring the proper labelling of imported goods so that they are designated as coming from "an illegally Occupied Palestinian Territory"?

Alistair Burt: This is a long and difficult process, as the hon. Gentleman rightly knows. We have a policy on labelling, and continued conversations will go on with the state of Israel in relation to suggestions, such as we heard last week, that new housing units should be built in East Jerusalem. This is a complex process and the UK does not believe in boycotts or sanctions, but clear labelling has been in place for some time so that consumers can take their choice.

Desmond Swayne (Conservative): We have contributed to a number of EU structures that have been demolished. Will my right hon. Friend ask the Government of Israel for our money back?

Alistair Burt: I think my right hon. Friend is referring to some work done by the EU. The EU has not sought compensation from the state of Israel in relation to that, and no decision has been taken on any further action.

Ian Austin (Labour): Settlements are a barrier, but they are far from the only barrier to peace. The building blocks for the peace process are trade and economic development in the west bank; demilitarisation and democracy in Gaza; and support for co-existence projects that get Israelis and Palestinians working together, the funding for which, I am sorry to say, this Government have stopped. Will the Minister reinstate funding for co-existence projects, to build the peace process?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman understands this issue extremely well, and I agree with his analysis that this is a complex issue, where there are many different building blocks to try to revitalise the peace process, and settlements are

far from the only barrier to that. Trade and investment remain important, but we will be looking further at what prospects there are for any new initiatives. I am aware of the co-existence projects that he mentions, and I will certainly be looking at that when carrying out my joint responsibilities in the Department for International Development.

Liz McInnes (Labour): We are all glad to see the Minister for the Middle East back and working on this issue again, but this is the second time in the space of a week that the Foreign Secretary has declined to speak about the middle east and devolved the job to the Minister instead—and that follows his failure even to mention Israel or Palestine in the Tory election manifesto. I simply ask the Minister: when are we going to hear the Foreign Secretary stand up and condemn the new illegal settlements?

Alistair Burt: I thank the hon. Lady for her warm welcome. I much enjoy being back in this role, no matter what is thrown at me as part of it. The Foreign Secretary strongly condemned the proposals that were announced for the west bank recently. I like to think he has confidence in his Minister for the Middle East—as he has confidence in his full ministerial team—to answer appropriate questions, although I have never known him to be shy of answering a question when necessary.

<http://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-07-11/debates/0040B96F-04A5-42E8-8832-2ACAB38BA07F/IllegalSettlementsOccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

Topical Questions: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Andrew Percy (Conservative): T10. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said last week that he would continue paying prisoner salaries, even to people who have murdered innocent civilians, if it cost him his job. Does the Minister agree that there is no way in which there will be peace in the middle east without co-existence projects and support for co-existence on the Palestinian side? [900337]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): My hon. Friend is right: there are a number of barriers on the Palestinian side to being able to make progress, including support for incitement and terror. The Department for International Development is looking extremely carefully to ensure that no payments go in the wrong direction. It is certainly true that the Palestinian Authority needs to look very hard at ensuring that it is not giving the wrong signals as we try to make progress on the middle east peace process.

<http://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-07-11/debates/0D64CCDC-1294-42EF-AE60-6751895F9905/TopicalQuestions#contribution-59240DBF-6E63-45CE-9672-5F98FE44BF4E>

House of Commons Written Answer

Karim and Maher Younes

Joan Ryan (Labour) [3584] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Palestinian Authority on the naming of a square in Jenin after Karim Younes and a square in Tulkarem after Maher Younes.

Alistair Burt: While we have not had any discussions on these specific issues with the Palestinian Authority (PA), a UK delegation led by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Permanent Under-Secretary raised the issue of incitement with the PA on 21 June. The UK continues to urge the Palestinian leadership to avoid engaging in, or encouraging, any type of action and language that makes it more difficult to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-06/3584/>

State of Palestine

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL179] Her Majesty's Government, further to the answer by Baroness Goldie on 26 June, when they will decide whether it is appropriate to recognise the state of Palestine, and what conditions will have to be met.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK will recognise a Palestinian state at a time when we judge it best serves the objective of peace. Bilateral recognition outside of the framework of a negotiated settlement would not end the occupation nor the problems that come with it. The UK is committed to a two-state solution leading to a viable and sovereign Palestinian state living alongside a safe and secure Israel.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-06-26/HL179/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2017-06-26/debates/D88295FB-C6A0-4512-B0E2-71490B86B308/PalestineNon-JewishPopulation#contribution-C1D4FAC9-E71E-4CBB-AC68-7545D9D7E305>

Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL241] Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the Archbishop of Canterbury's suggestion that Hamas be included in talks to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Our policy on Hamas remains clear: Hamas must accept long standing Quartet conditions and renounce violence, recognise Israel and accept previously signed agreements. We call on those in the region with influence over Hamas to encourage them to take these steps. Whilst the UK has a policy of no contact with Hamas, it is ultimately a matter for the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to decide who should be involved in discussions to resolve the conflict. The UK supports a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-06-28/HL241/>

Gaza: pollution

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL242] Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the increase in the level of pollution off the coast of Gaza reportedly due to the discharge of untreated sewage.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not made any assessment on this issue, we are aware that a number of Israeli institutions and organisations have highlighted strong environmental concerns around water pollution and Gaza sewage. We also have concerns about Gaza's chronic power shortages, which have caused problems with water supply and sewage treatment.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-06-28/HL242/>

Gaza: electricity

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL266] Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to (1) the Palestinian Authority, and (2) the government of Israel, following the reduction of electricity supply to Gaza to just 2.5 hours per day.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Our Ambassador to Tel Aviv and our Consul-General to Jerusalem have raised our concerns with the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Authority respectively over the situation in Gaza. The Minister for the Middle East raised the situation in Gaza with the Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister and the Israeli Ambassador to London on 22 and 23 June respectively.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-06-29/HL266/>

Gaza

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL245] Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the preparations in place if Gaza were to become uninhabitable by 2020 as described in the report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development published in 2015.

Lord Bates: The UK Government is concerned by the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and it is vital that a further deterioration in living standards is avoided. We are working alongside international partners to make urgent improvements in infrastructure, economic opportunities, energy and water, to support vulnerable Gazans today and avoid a serious crisis in the future. However as the United Nations report makes clear, aid alone cannot solve the problems in Gaza. We continue to press all parties on the need for a sustainable political solution for Gaza which will address Israel's legitimate security concerns whilst opening up movement and access. Resolving the current energy situation is a particular priority.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-06-28/HL245/>

The report referred to above can be read at

http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/tdb62d3_en.pdf

Palestinian Authority

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL283] Her Majesty's Government what representations have been made to the Palestinian Authority regarding the reported use of foreign aid to make payments to convicted terrorists and their families.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: No UK aid is used for payments to Palestinian prisoners or their families. UK financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority (PA) contributes to the salaries of vetted public servants in the health and education sectors only. We have consistently raised prisoner payments at the highest levels with the PA and Palestine Liberation Organisation, and we continue to urge that these payments are more transparent, needs-based and affordable.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-06-29/HL283/>

Gaza

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL411] Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to respond to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, following the decision by the government of Israel to implement a request from the Palestinian Authority to reduce the flow of electricity supplies from Israel to Gaza.

Lord Bates: The UK is working closely with the UN to monitor the humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are also funding basic service delivery in Gaza through the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. We urge all the parties to find a sustainable solution to the current energy situation.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-07-03/HL411/>

United Nations

Living conditions in Gaza 'more and more wretched' over past decade, UN finds

A decade after Hamas seized the Gaza Strip, the living conditions for two million people in the Palestinian enclave are deteriorating "further and faster" than the prediction made

in 2012 that the enclave would become “unlivable” by 2020, a new United Nations report has found.

“Gaza has continued on its trajectory of 'de-development', in many cases even faster than we had originally projected,” said Robert Piper, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities, in a press release on the new report, “Gaza – 10 years later.” ...

The report called on Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and the international community to take action towards more sustainable development investments, reinvigoration of Gaza's productive sectors, improvement of freedom of movement for both people and goods, as well as respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

“The alternative will be a Gaza that is more isolated and more desperate,” warned Mr. Piper. “The threat of a renewed, more devastating escalation will increase, and the prospects for intra-Palestinian reconciliation will dwindle – and with them, the prospects for peace between Israel and Palestine.” ...

While an earlier projection that the coastal aquifer would become unusable by 2016 has been revised to the end of 2017, Gaza's only water source is predicted to be irreversibly-depleted by 2020, unless immediate remedial action is taken.

Access to materials, which are necessary to allow the Gazan economy, infrastructure and basic services to recover from the 2014 conflict, remains highly restricted. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57157#.WWYts9OGM5s>

Gaza – Ten Years Later

https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/gaza_10_years_later_-_11_july_2017.pdf

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Power shortages in Gaza deepening the humanitarian crisis, say UN rights experts

Longstanding power shortages in Gaza have deepened the humanitarian crisis with hospitals in precarious conditions, water shortages growing, and untreated sewage being dumped into the Mediterranean, United Nations independent human rights experts* today warned.

“The two million residents of Gaza are suffering through a humanitarian crisis that is entirely human-made,” the experts said. “It represents a complete failure of all parties to uphold their fundamental human rights obligations, including the inalienable right to life.”

“Reports indicate that electricity is now available for six consecutive hours at the most, often less, followed by 12 hour periods of blackout. The situation is untenable,” they warned. ...

Israel, as the occupier controlling the entry and exit of goods and people, bore the primary responsibility for the deterioration of the situation, they said, and should honour its commitments under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The Rapporteurs emphasized, however, that the current dispute between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas over the payment of fuel taxes led to the recent additional cuts, and has contributed to significantly worsening the crisis.

“We call on all those involved to immediately resolve their issues, and not to further penalize the residents of Gaza for political disputes among elites,” they said. “We call on the international community not to turn a blind eye to Gaza. And we call for a full and immediate end to the 10-year blockade and closure, which amounts to collective punishment contrary to international law.” ...

“Many operating rooms have now been shut down, basic health services have been drastically cut and complex diagnostic equipment and interventions are available only intermittently,” they said.

The experts noted that drinkable desalinated water is becoming less and less available, while untreated sewage continues to be dumped into the Mediterranean at the rate of 100 million litres a day and is possibly worsening aquifer contamination. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21866&LangID=E>

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Other Relevant Information

European Court of Human Rights

Ban on wearing face covering in public in Belgium did not violate Convention rights

... The case concerned the ban on the wearing in public of clothing that partly or totally covers the face under the Belgian law of 1 June 2011.

The Court found in particular that the restriction sought to guarantee the conditions of “living together” and the “protection of the rights and freedoms of others” and that it was “necessary in a democratic society”. ...

... the Court explained that, through their direct and constant contact with the stakeholders in their country, the State authorities were in principle better placed than an international court to assess the local needs and context. Therefore, in adopting the provisions in question, the Belgian State had sought to respond to a practice that it considered to be incompatible, in Belgian society, with social communication and more generally the establishment of human relations, which were indispensable for life in society. ...

... as regards the proportionality of the restriction, the Court noted that the sanction for noncompliance with the ban under Belgian law could range from a fine to a prison sentence. Imprisonment was reserved, however, for repeat offenders and was not applied automatically. ...

Ms Belcacemi and Ms Oussar present themselves as Muslims who have decided on their own initiative to wear the niqab – a veil covering the face except for the eyes – on account of their religious convictions.

Following the enactment on 1 June 2011 of the law in question, Ms Belcacemi initially decided to continue wearing the veil in the street. However, under pressure, she subsequently decided to remove her veil temporarily, being afraid that she might be stopped in the street and then heavily fined or even sent to prison. Ms Oussar, for her part, states that she has decided to stay at home, with the resulting restriction on her private and social life. ...

Relying on Articles 8 (right to respect for private and family life), 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), and 10 (freedom of expression), taken separately and together with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights, Ms Belcacemi and Ms Oussar complained about the ban on wearing the full-face veil.

Ms Belcacemi and Ms Oussar also relied on Articles 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment), 5 § 1 (right to liberty and security), 11 (freedom of assembly and association) and Article 2 of Protocol No. 4 (freedom of movement) to the Convention, taken separately or together with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination). ...

The Court ... found that the impugned restriction could be regarded as “necessary in a democratic society”, explaining that this conclusion applied both under Article 8 of the Convention and under Article 9. Consequently, there had been no violation either of Article 8 or of Article 9 of the Convention. ...

The Court reiterated that a general policy or measure which had disproportionate prejudicial effects on a group of individuals could be regarded as discriminatory – even if

it did not specifically target the group and there was no discriminatory intent – if that policy or measure lacked “objective and reasonable” justification, if it did not pursue a “legitimate aim” or if there was no “reasonable relationship of proportionality” between the means used and the aim pursued. In the present case, the measure had an objective and reasonable justification ... Consequently, there had been no violation of Article 14 of the Convention taken together with Articles 8 and 9 of the Convention. ...

The Court took the view that no separate question arose under Article 10 (freedom of expression), taken separately and in conjunction with Article 14 of the Convention, and it dismissed the other complaints raised by Ms Belcacemi and Ms Oussar, pursuant to Article 35 §§ 3 and 4 (conditions of admissibility) of the Convention. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://tinyurl.com/y7awt5hr>

The full judgement, which is only available in French, can be read at

<http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-175141>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Scottish Parliament

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Repeal) (Scotland) Bill

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/105269.aspx>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

Caste in Great Britain and Equality Law (closing date 18 September 2017)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/caste-in-great-britain-and-equality-law-a-public-consultation>

Workplace Diversity (Wales) (closing date not stated)

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

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