

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Joint Committee on Human Rights

Evidence Session: Inquiry into Freedom of Speech in Universities

Q36 ... **Professor Adam Tickell (Vice-Chancellor, University of Sussex):** ... We have to be mindful of four duties on us. One is the Education (No. 2) Act and the requirement on us to promote and support free speech. I am utterly committed to that as the foundational principle. As the Committee knows, there are three countervailing requirements on us: public order legislation; the public sector equalities duty; and the Prevent legislation. We have ensured that things that are likely or that might fall foul of those three duties on me and the institution go through a degree of scrutiny so that we do not fall foul of those other aspects of the law. ...

Baroness Amos (Director, SOAS, University of London): ... I have no sense that, as a result of the policies that we put in place, people have not been invited to speak at those events. However, I am aware of a sense among a lot of our students that they are operating in an environment where they feel under particular scrutiny. Students who may be Muslim or come from an ethnic minority or have a particular political view feel under additional scrutiny as a result of that. ...

One of my concerns, which we have raised with HEFCE and the Department for Education, is that we have legislation but we also have guidance that goes further than the legislation and which we are constantly told is statutory. We have very clear legal advice that it is not, yet we are being judged against what we are told is statutory guidance. ...

Q37 ... **Patrick Kilduff (President, Edinburgh University Students' Association):** ... we know that many students, especially those from BME backgrounds and minorities, are concerned about the impact and implications of the Prevent policy due to the grey areas and to what it could do to the whole virtue of being a higher education student. ...

Frida Gustafsson (President, Students' Union, University of Sussex): ... One example is the recent event with Bill Etheridge, a UKIP Member of Parliament ... As Bill has in the past encouraged UKIP's young activists to consider the presentational skills of Adolf Hitler and claimed that multiculturalism would lead to rivers of blood, we sensed that there might be a risk of that happening again. The purpose of us mitigating those risks and putting in place the panel that we then did was not to make the event not happen; it was to make sure that we as a charity were providing a platform and an event that was not just a place for someone to shout out harassment or racism, or to glorify

fascist dictators. ...

Alex Burghart (Conservative): You put those processes in place and then the event went ahead?

Frida Gustafsson: No, that event was cancelled by Bill, who said that in effect we no-platformed him. Interestingly, he said his right to freedom of speech was not upheld because we wanted his opinions to be questioned, not just taken as they were. ...

Q39 Fiona Bruce (Conservative): ... because of the procedures that student groups are having to go through, there is what is called “an evident chilling of free speech” on many of our campuses, making the running of student groups too onerous. Do you think these procedures are chilling free speech? ...

Adam Tickell: ... There is talk that universities remove books from library shelves. I checked at the beginning of the week with the executive director of Research Libraries UK, the umbrella body for research libraries that also includes the National Library of Ireland and a bunch of other significant libraries, to see how many of its members had removed books from shelves. The answer was none. Not a single library book has been removed from a single shelf in a single university research library in this country, to the knowledge of any of the librarians. What has happened is that a small number of anti-Semitic books by David Irving have been taken off the open shelves and put on the restricted shelves so that people who are interested in doing research or want to go and read those books can do so, with reference and on request to the librarian. So we hear all sorts of claims about the inhibition and chilling of free speech in British universities, but I would say that the evidence base is anaemically small. ...

Chair (Harriet Harman, Labour): Obviously those books are objectionable for understandable reasons to a lot of people, but are they illegal?

Adam Tickell: ... They are legal. There are a very small number of books that are illegal. The *Anarchist's Cookbook*, a terrorist training manual, is not a legal book to have in the UK. I have to say, presumably outwith the restricted section in the British Library, that there will not be any university that has that—and nor should they. Apart from that, I am genuinely not aware, nor is the representative body, of any book that has been restricted. ...

Patrick Kilduff: Free speech does not exist in a vacuum. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights outlines that there are certain caveats that include accessibility, inclusivity and so on. The key reason why I would say there has been a slight chilling is, as Baroness Amos pointed out, due to Prevent. If we believe that free speech is so that people can talk truth to power, especially marginalised groups, then this is stopping marginalised groups—Jews, Muslims and BME students—from being able to voice their concerns and host events. That is what is chilling. ... The real threats are coming from government legislation like Prevent. ...

Q42 Alex Burghart: ... As you may be aware, Baroness Deech, a former Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, has told the Committee that universities such as SOAS and the University of Manchester are regarded as having an anti-Semitic environment and this has led to fewer applicants from young people of Jewish backgrounds. Do you think that that is an accurate assessment of your institution?

Baroness Amos: No, I do not. I do not know where she gets those figures from in terms of fewer students from a Jewish background coming to SOAS. There are periodically reports in the press of SOAS being an anti-Semitic institution. Much of this goes back to the fact that there was a poll on BDS at SOAS by the students' union which has been supported by students in some faculties; it is not the school's position. We were also in the press following a report by the then head of the SOAS Jewish Society that Jewish students did not want to wear anything that identified them as Jewish. Through our Centre for Jewish Studies, we talked to a number of Jewish students on campus and there is no evidence that that is the case, but we do have students who feel that when the discussion is around the Middle East, particularly Israel/Palestine, there is not

necessarily an understanding of the position of Jewish students in relation to those issues, in particular their support for Israel—if they are supportive, because there is not a uniform view of Israel. I and, I think, many others were concerned about the reports that we had students who felt that they could not openly speak Hebrew and so on. That is not the sense from the debates and discussions that we have had with those students, but we remain very vigilant about it. We are an inclusive campus; we are one of the few places in the country where you can do Israeli studies, where we have a Jewish studies centre and so on. That diversity in what we do is very important for us and we want to be able to continue it.

Alex Burghart: From talking to the Jewish student groups in SOAS, they have given you no sense that they feel inhibited in doing what they want to do as members of the university.

Baroness Amos: As I said, what has come back to me is very much a sense that when the Middle East, particularly Israel/Palestine, is being discussed, there is a lack of understanding of the position of some of our Jewish students in relation to supporting Israel. We tried, again through our Centre for Jewish Studies, to talk to representatives of the Jewish student union society about some of what was in the press. They did not necessarily want to talk to our faculty or indeed give evidence to back up the claims that had been made. We as a university administration have had discussions with the Board of Deputies, the Union of Jewish Students and others because of our concerns about what has been reported in the press, but I certainly do not feel that those reports about SOAS being anti-Semitic are fair. ...

Alex Burghart: Have there been any instances at your university where student protest has prevented a planned event from going ahead? ...

Timothy O'Shea (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Edinburgh): : It has happened at Edinburgh. Obviously, we liaise closely with the civil authorities. If the civil authorities say that there is a risk to people, we take that seriously. Where that has happened, we have always rescheduled. The Israeli ambassador is a classic example, obviously. You need to be a little careful with the concept of student protest. In a city like Edinburgh, where the university has 550 buildings spread over the city, if there is a protest and, for example, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign is there, clearly there will be student members of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign but also plenty of people who are not students also protesting. Particularly for universities such as SOAS and Edinburgh in an urban environment, a student protest is not a clear-cut thing. There may be a protest that requires the authorities to liaise with the civil authorities. That is not new. I have been the head of the institution for 15 years. You get one or two of those every year. You talk to the police and the police give you their advice. If the police say, "This really needs to be stopped, otherwise somebody is going to end up in hospital", you have to follow their advice.

Baroness Amos: That is a very important point. A number of the events that we have at SOAS are open events, so they are open to members of the public. We have had events disrupted by members of the public. On the whole, these have been events about Palestine disrupted by people who are pro-Israel, for example. We have had two or three of those in the last year. ...

Q44 Patrick Kilduff: ... we have a number of students from BME backgrounds, Jewish backgrounds and especially Muslim backgrounds who come to us with concerns about hosting events or taking part in certain things because there are such grey areas around the policy, its implementation, our duty to enforce it and what the ramifications could be in the university and in civil society. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/human-rights-committee/freedom-of-speech-in-universities/oral/76710.html>

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House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Gaza

Chris Davies (Conservative) [120721] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent reports he has received of rocket fire into Israel from Gaza.

Alistair Burt: We are gravely concerned by recent increases in terrorist rocket fire. Since the 6th December 2017, 27 rockets have been fired from the Gaza strip. Rocket attacks wreak havoc on the daily lives of Israelis and make achieving peace more difficult. We call on all parties to refrain from violence and to commit to a negotiated solution to end the conflict.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-12-20/120721/>

Israel: Palestinians

Chris Davies (Conservative) [120722] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the Palestinian Authority on re-joining direct peace talks with Israel without preconditions.

Alistair Burt: The UK is committed to making progress towards a two-state solution. We regularly press both the Israelis and Palestinians to engage in direct negotiations that will lead to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. Our Consul General in Jerusalem reiterated our support for a negotiated two-state solution with Saeb Erekat, Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee, on 2 January.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-12-20/120722/>

Ahed Tamimi

Grahame Morris (Labour) [120753] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if his Department will make any representations to its Israeli counterpart on the arrest of Ahed Tamimi.

Alistair Burt: On 2 January officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv raised Ahed Tamimi's case with the Israeli authorities, noting the negative attention that the case was generating and the UK's long-standing concerns about the treatment of Palestinian minors in Israeli military detention.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-12-20/120753/>

Israel: Palestinians

Jo Stevens (Labour) [121577] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent steps the UK Government has taken to reaffirm its commitment to a two state solution in light of the non-adoption of UN Security Council Resolution S/2017/1060 on the status of Jerusalem.

Alistair Burt: As I reiterated to the House on 9th January, the UK believes there is a need to make urgent progress towards a two-state solution and as such we continue to encourage a return to direct negotiations between the parties. The Foreign Secretary and I both discussed the UK's unequivocal support for the two-state solution when we met Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki in London on 8 January. In line with our long-standing position on Jerusalem, the UK voted in favour of a resolution on Jerusalem at the UN Security Council on 18 December, and the resolution at the UN General Assembly on 21 December.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-08/121577/>

The Minister's comments, referred to above, can be read at <http://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-01-09/debates/E915AF82-CA53-4856-9A97-AAAFD962C9B1/IsraelAndPalestineTwo-StateSolution>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister for the Middle East statement on settlement plans across the West Bank

Foreign Office minister Alistair Burt said: The UK strongly condemns the advancement by the Israeli authorities of plans and tenders for settlement units across the West Bank. We call on Israel to reconsider these proposals. Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the physical viability of the two-state solution.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-the-middle-east-statement-on-settlement-plans-across-the-west-bank>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Debate

Iraq: Religious and Ethnic Minorities

col 411 Lord Glasman (Labour): ... In 1914, Baghdad was still a majority Jewish city; there are now no Jews left in the area. We should not be narcissistic: the Iraq war accelerated trends, but it did not create those trends, which are long-standing. ...

col 416 Baroness Deech (Crossbench): ... The Jews of Iraq had a history going back 2,000 years; now they are non-existent. A century ago, one-third of Baghdad's population was Jewish. We have heard much about the centenary of the Balfour Declaration in recent months. One aim of that important document was that, "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the ... rights ... or the ... political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country".

What followed was the persecution, killing and expulsion of Jews across the Middle East. Jews allegedly came to Iraq after the exile from Jerusalem in 587 BC. Babylon was a focus of Judaism for more than 1,000 years. A millennium later, Islam arrived there and persecution started. In the 1930s, Iraq followed the German lead in barring Jews from education and the professions. In imitation of the Nazis, there came a pogrom, or "Farhud", in June 1941, during which an Iraqi mob burned Jewish property, looted houses and hundreds of Jews lost their lives. After the creation of Israel, things got even worse for the Iraqi Jews, regardless of their political affiliation.

Jews were dismissed from virtually all jobs, and to be suspected of being a Zionist was punishable by execution. At first, they were forbidden to emigrate; it later became government policy to get rid of them all. Nearly all the Jewish families left in the 1950s, and their property was forfeit. Saddam Hussein hanged nine Jews as supposed traitors in front of a crowd. The United States has guarded the significant archive of Jewish artefacts in Iraq, all that remains of the community, but is likely to return it to Iraq. Will the Government urge the US to continue to protect that archive?

This year, a new law by the Iraqi Government will target Palestinians living there. It will effectively abolish rights given to Palestinian refugees, causing them to be treated as foreigners rather than nationals, even if born in Iraq. The new law deprives Palestinians living in Iraq of their right to free education, healthcare and travel documents, and denies them work in state institutions. Most of that community has gone to other countries, such as Canada, Chile, Brazil and elsewhere in Europe, where they are better treated than they have been in their homelands. Will our Government press the Iraqi Government to

reverse this law, number 76 of 2017, and condemn the treatment of Palestinians in Iraq?...

I fear that these excellent intentions may not achieve much, because at the apex of all international effort lies the UN Human Rights Council, a body now so perverted that it no longer makes sense to support it. What is the use of the UK lobbying other countries and supporting UN resolutions on religious persecution when the UNHRC is peopled with representatives of the most egregious offenders? ... In China, 1.3 billion people are denied freedom of speech, assembly and religion. Tibet is occupied and Tibetans tortured. In Russia, dissidents are harassed, arrested and assassinated. Crimea is annexed and Ukraine bombarded. In Saudi Arabia beheadings are at an all-time high and they bomb Yemeni civilians. The response of the UNHRC is largely silence and the welcoming as members of those atrocious states. Only one country is permanently on the agenda of the UNHRC and that is Israel, targeted by the Arab members in an effort to deflect attention from themselves.

Earlier this year our Government thankfully became a torch-bearer for the truth. The British mission blasted the UN body as biased and overly focused on Israel. The UNHRC has breath-taking double standards and is outrageously biased against the only country in the Middle East whose Christian population has grown, namely Israel. It is time to call out the hypocrisy of the UNHRC, as a preliminary to safeguarding the religious minorities of Iraq and the wider Middle East. Will the Minister ensure that the UK's place on the UNHRC is, as it was in the past and I hope will be in the future, to tell the truth and defend the persecuted? ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-01-11/debates/1616BEA8-EC53-4C8A-AE7E-62E2DD756265/IraqReligiousAndEthnicMinorities>

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Other Relevant Information

Sussex University

The Sussex Hate Crime Project

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sussex-hate-crime-project-report.pdf&site=430>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666576/draft-animal-welfare-bill-171212.pdf

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

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

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

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

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/organdonationdeemedconsent.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

**** closes in 5 days**

Draft Animal Welfare Bill (closing date 17 January 2018)

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/news-parliament-2017/draft-animal-welfare-bill-17-19/>

Draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill (closing date 31 January 2018)

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/animal-health-and-welfare/consultation-on-the-animal-welfare-bill/>

Introducing 'opt-out' consent for organ and tissue donation in England (closing date 6 March 2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/introducing-opt-out-consent-for-organ-and-tissue-donation-in-england>

Promoting Organ Donation and Transplantation in Northern Ireland (closing date 9 March 2018)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/promoting-organ-donation-and-transplantation-northern-ireland>

Electoral Reform (Scotland) (closing date 12 March 2018)

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00529431.pdf>

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