

Political Affairs Digest

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

Contents

Home Affairs

Holocaust

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answer

Business of the House: antisemitism

Bob Blackman (Conservative): The Community Security Trust's annual report shows a growth in anti-Semitic attacks in this country amidst a pernicious increase in anti-Semitism more generally. At the same time, the chief inspector of schools is making a speech today about the growth of religious extremism in our schools. May we have a debate in the Chamber in Government time on how to combat religious extremism and pernicious attacks on people's religions?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a worrying story. All of us will have read in the press about the rise in anti-Semitic attacks and the use of words that can be extremely hurtful. He is right to suggest a debate, and I encourage him to talk to the Backbench Business Committee about securing such a debate so that all Members can share their views.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-02-01/debates/CEBF573D-9C65-46F9-A072-92444B54FB63/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-2086E51B-02BD-46B4-AAE7-4EE8FD2398AF>

House of Commons Written Answers

Faith Schools: Security

The following three questions all received the same answer

Andrew Gwynne (Labour) [124573] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Secretary of State plans to reform the planning system to ensure that Jewish religious schools can develop barriers and other security infrastructure to ensure the safety of pupils and staff.

Andrew Gwynne (Labour) [124574] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Secretary of State plans to reform the planning system to ensure that Muslim religious schools can develop barriers and other security infrastructure to ensure the safety of pupils and staff.

Andrew Gwynne (Labour) [124575] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to reform the planning system to allow Christian religious schools to develop physical barriers and other security infrastructure to ensure the safety of pupils and staff.

Heather Wheeler: The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) sets out guidance in creating safe and accessible communities. The NPPF recommends that local planning authorities ensure their policies and decisions aim to create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion.

Reference should also be made to the guidance "Protecting crowded places: design and technical issues" jointly published by the Home Office and National Counter Terrorism Security Office, which can be found here:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-24/124573/>

and

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-24/124574/>

and

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-24/124575/>

The National Planning Policy Framework, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/60772/16950.pdf

The Planning Practice Guidance, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

"Protecting crowded places", referred to above, can be read at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97992/design-tech-issues.pdf

Coroners: Working Hours

Edward Davey (Liberal Democrat) [124681] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department is taking to implement the recommendation of the Chief Coroner, set out in his Annual Report 2016 - 2017, that coroner areas should provide an out-of-hours service to meet the needs of those whose faiths require early burial.

Phillip Lee: Out of hours services in London are funded and arranged by local authorities and the Metropolitan Police Service. The Government is clear about the importance of out of hours' coroner services and in recent years it has worked with local authorities and the police to encourage the deployment of additional staff. Last October eight additional members of staff who will work out of hours took up post, recruited and employed by the police, but the Government will continue to work with local authorities and the police on this.

The availability of out of hours services in London will benefit the whole community, not just people of any particular faith.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-24/124681/>

House of Lords Library

Letter from Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen to the Bishop of Durham regarding religious literacy in local authorities and national civil service staff

http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-0086/Lord_Bishop_Durham_stronger_charities_debate.pdf

UK Parliament Ministerial Statement

Faith Practices

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): The Government have today published the independent review into the application of Sharia law in England and Wales. The review has been laid before the House (Cm 9560). Copies of the report will be available from the Vote Office and it is also available on the Home Office website.

The review was commissioned by the then Home Secretary in May 2016 and was chaired by Professor Mona Siddiqui, an internationally renowned expert in Islamic and inter-religious studies. Professor Siddiqui was supported by a review panel of experts that included experienced family law barrister Sam Momtaz QC, retired High Court judge Sir Mark Hedley, and specialist family law solicitor Anne Marie Hutchinson OBE QC. The panel was advised by two religious and theological experts, Imam Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi and Imam Qari Asim.

Sharia law has no jurisdiction in England and Wales and the decisions of Sharia councils are not legally binding. The review focused on whether and to what extent the application of Sharia law by Sharia councils may be incompatible with the law in England and Wales. This included ways in which Sharia law may be being misused or exploited in a way that may discriminate against certain groups, undermine shared values and cause social harms.

To gather evidence the review team issued a public call for evidence and ran a number of oral evidence sessions. During the course of the review, the review chair and panel heard evidence from stakeholders including users of Sharia councils, women's rights groups, academics, lawyers and Sharia councils. I am grateful to Professor Siddiqui for the thoroughness of her review and for the review team's comprehensive report.

The review found that most of the work of Sharia councils concerns Islamic divorces, and that the applicants are mostly women. While there are a number of reasons women desire an Islamic divorce, a significant driver is that some Muslim couples do not have a civil marriage as well as an Islamic ceremony. The review also found evidence of a range of practices across Sharia councils, both positive and negative. The review concludes with a series of recommendations to Government.

The review made three recommendations:

Recommendation 1 (legislative change): amendments to marriage law to (a) ensure that civil marriages are conducted before or at the same time as the Islamic marriage ceremony and (b) establish the right to a civil divorce.

Recommendation 2 (building understanding): proposes developing programmes to (i) raise Muslim couples' awareness that Islamic marriages do not afford them the protections under the law that come with a civil marriage because their partnership is not recognised as a legal marriage; and (ii) encourages Muslim couples that have or are having an Islamic marriage to register for a civil marriage as well.

Recommendation 3 (regulation of Sharia councils): proposes regulating Sharia councils through the creation of a state-established body that would create a code of practice for Sharia councils to accept and implement.

The Government will carefully consider the review's findings. The review team's failure to reach a unanimous agreement on recommendation three (regulation of Sharia councils) demonstrates the complexity of the issues. The Government consider that the proposal to create a state-facilitated or endorsed regulation scheme for Sharia councils would confer upon them legitimacy as alternative forms of dispute resolution. The Government do not consider there to be a role for the state to act in this way. Britain has a long tradition of freedom of worship and religious tolerance and regulation could add legitimacy to the perception of the existence of a parallel legal system even though the outcomes of Sharia councils have no standing in civil law, as the independent review has made clear. Many people of different faiths follow religious codes and practices and

benefit from their guidance. The Government have no intention of changing this position and for this reason cannot accept recommendation three.

The review found some evidence of Sharia councils forcing women to make concessions to gain a divorce, of inadequate safeguarding policies, and a failure to signpost applicants to legal remedies. This is not acceptable. Where Sharia councils exist, they must abide by the law. Legislation is in place to protect the rights of women and prevent discriminatory practice. The Government will work with the appropriate regulatory authorities to ensure that this legislation and the protections it establishes are being enforced fully and effectively. [HCWS442]

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-02-01/debates/18020149000008/FaithPractices>

Home Office

The independent review into the application of sharia law in England and Wales

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/678473/6.4_152_HO_CPFPG_Report_into_Sharia_Law_in_the_UK_PRINT.pdf

Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

Racism

Anas Sarwar (Labour): In the past few days, I have been inundated with stories of everyday racism and Islamophobia. They include the story of a young woman who had her hijab ripped off her head at the underground station; of a child who is scared to go to school because he is regularly called a terrorist; of a hotel worker who is regularly racially abused but is told by his employer that the customer comes first; and of a council worker who is convinced that he missed out on a promotion because of his colour and religion. That is not about one individual or one organisation; it is about a culture. On Tuesday in the Parliament, we launched the cross-party group on tackling Islamophobia, with the support of more than 50 organisations. Will the First Minister commit herself and her Government to working constructively with us on the important issues that the cross-party group raises? It is in the interest of all of our citizens to defeat prejudice no matter the gender, religion or colour.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I give that commitment. I also take the opportunity to pay tribute to Anas Sarwar. Although he and I are political opponents locally as well as nationally, I genuinely admired the way in which he spoke up this week and the bravery with which he did it. It would have been brave in any circumstances, but all of us know that raising issues that involve people in our own parties is even more difficult, and so the praise for having done so should be even greater.

Everyday racism, Islamophobia or any form of prejudice and bigotry is unacceptable, and it is unacceptable when Anas Sarwar, Humza Yousaf or anyone in our society is the subject or victim of it. I am proud that we have in the Parliament today people who are celebrating hijab awareness week. Like any women, Muslim women should be allowed to wear exactly what they want.

Scotland should never presume to think that it is immune from racism. Anas Sarwar has demonstrated that this week. We must unite against it. Many things divide us in the chamber—that is the mark of a healthy democracy—but racism is one of the issues that should absolutely unite us and it is to Anas Sarwar's credit that he has put it even higher up the agenda. All of us should resolve to do everything that it takes to ensure that Scotland is a place where there is zero tolerance of racism in any form.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11339&i=103184#ScotParlOR>

Welsh Government

Wales leading on organ donation consent rates

The latest Organ Donation and Transplantation statistics reveal a 72% consent rate and approximately 24.3 donors per million population (pmp), putting Wales at the top of the list.

Statistics also show that 39% of the Welsh population have registered to opt-in to donate their organs following their death.

For the first three quarters during 2017-18, there were 55 deceased organ donors, 16 more donors than the same period the previous year.

On 1 December 2015, Wales was the first country in the UK to move to a soft opt-out system of consent to organ donation. This means that if a person has not registered a decision to become an organ donor (opted in) or a decision not to become an organ donor (opted out), they will be considered as having no objection to being an organ donor – this is known as deemed consent. However, if individuals don't tell their family of their decision to donate, the family may not honour that decision and over-ride the organ donor registration or not support deemed consent.

The figures also demonstrate a decrease in the number of transplants compared to the corresponding timeframe for 2016/17; this was mainly due to fewer living transplants taking place. However, fewer people died whilst on the transplant waiting list at the end of the third quarter of 2017/18 in comparison to the previous year. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://gov.wales/newsroom/health-and-social-services/2018/consentrate/?lang=en>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Joan Ryan (Labour) [125342] 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.

Alistair Burt: HMG officials will complete a review of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) commitment to the Partnership Principles before the next annual Memorandum of Understanding dialogue with the PA. The date of the next dialogue has not yet been confirmed, but is likely to be completed in the first half of 2018.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-29/125342/>

Middle East: Overseas Aid

Tulip Siddiq (Labour) [124947] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how much funding her Department has provided to (a) Jordan, (b) Iraq, (c) Israel, (d) The Palestinian Territories, (e) Turkey, (f) Saudi Arabia and (g) Yemen since 2016.

Alistair Burt: Bilateral official development assistance (ODA) provided by the Department for International Development in 2016 are published in Statistics on International Development 2017:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-2017>

This shows calendar spend from 1 January to 31 December 2016. The figures include ODA provided by other government departments and cross government funds. The figures for 2017 will be published in autumn 2018.

Israel and Saudi Arabia are not eligible for ODA funding and the UK does not, therefore, contribute to bilateral ODA programmes in either country.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-25/124947/>

Scottish Parliament Motions

S5M-10251 Ivan McKee (SNP): Palestinian Residents' Health at Risk – That the Parliament expresses deep concern regarding the reported allegations raised by the human rights organisation, B'Tselem, that Palestinian land in the West Bank is being used for the treatment of Israeli waste, including hazardous waste; believes that Israel is using the occupation of the Palestinian territories to deny the Palestinian people dignity and is putting Palestinian residents' health at risk; understands that the exploitation of the occupied territories is illegal under international law, and calls for an immediate end to what it considers this unjust practice and for steps to be taken to prevent waste treatment facilities being operated by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-10251>

S5M-10250 Ivan McKee (SNP): Funding Cut to UN Relief and Works Agency – That the Parliament is appalled by the reported announcement by the United States Government that it is to cut its funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) by more than half; believes that this decision threatens the security of millions of Palestinian refugees, including those in need of emergency food assistance and other support in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza; is concerned that this will also impact on Palestinian refugees' access to primary health care and the right to education of 525,000 boys and girls in 700 UNRWA schools, and calls on the UK Government to reaffirm the UK's support for UNRWA, to ask the UN Secretary General to convene a special conference to develop new funding alliances to secure the future of UNRWA, to urgently make representations to the World Bank and IDB Trust Fund to consider the case for supporting UNRWA, and to promote the public appeal for funds that UNRWA has launched.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-10250>

TOP

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>

[TOP](#)

Consultations

** new or updated today

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>

Human Rights (Scottish Parliament) (closing date 16 March 2018)

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/106453.aspx>

[TOP](#)

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438