

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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UK Parliament Joint Committee on Human Rights

Inquiry: Freedom of Speech in Universities

Q68 Sam Gyimah MP (Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation): ... Threats to free speech are on the rise and I am concerned that this represents a creeping culture of censorship in our universities. On the face of it, it does not appear to be the case. The last survey of students in 2016 showed that 83% of students felt free to express views on campus. But it might not be right to accept that at face value because a number of events have given me real cause for concern; for example, the campaigns and protests against events featuring the prominent gay rights activists Peter Tatchell and Julie Bindel. These people are hardly reactionaries yet they have faced the sort of opposition on campus that you would associate with racists and fascists. Take the case of human rights activist Maryam Namazie: when she spoke at the Goldsmiths humanist society she was not only shouted down by members of the university's Islamic society but, ludicrously, she was condemned by the university's feminist society, which you could describe as a sort of secondary form of no-platforming. There is the difficulty of hosting events for Israel. I am reminded of an event at King's College London that had to be closed down because of violent protests. Finally, just as important is what is hard to measure: the large number of events that do not happen at all, either because organisers are worried about obstruction or because the overzealous enforcement of rules makes them seem more trouble than they are worth. ...

Q69 Sam Gyimah: ... there is a section within our universities which feels that you can restrict free speech if what you are doing is essentially molycoddling someone and shielding them from opinions and views that they might find offensive. I think that is wrong. I also think it is unacceptable. ...

Q70 Sam GyimahS: ... whether it is a non-student who turns up at a non-campus event or a student who decides to restrict free speech, whether using the rules or aggressively, where there is a public order issue I would want to see universities take appropriate steps, including involving the police where necessary.

Q71 Baroness Hamwee: Who should be responsible for what happens on student union premises? I know, and we have heard, that they do not all have the same legal position as to whether they are part of the university or they are owned by the student union and are not on a campus. There is a variety of premises. Should the universities be responsible for what happens there, or should it be a matter for the student unions themselves?

Sam Gyimah: The 1986 Act makes the universities responsible. It says that they should take reasonably practicable steps to ensure freedom of speech within the law for students, staff and visiting speakers, including having a code of practice. The students' union also has a key role here in relation to its ability to approve some events or not.

Q72 Sam Gyimah: ... the core uni experience is not just the transmission of skills or learning a new subject—or having your first beer, if you are that late—but coming across ideas that might even change your mind. I met a Jewish student who had been to Jewish schools all their life. They had a particular view of the Israeli-Palestinian issue. They went to university and were challenged and thought things through differently, and now one of their best friends is a Palestinian. ...

Q74 Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP (Minister of State for Security and Economic Crime, Home Office): ... freedom of speech is not absolute within the law ... There are lots of duties that, while they may not curtail it, put freedom of speech in an envelope. The Public Order Act 1986 prevents you inciting racial hatred or religious hatred. The Equality Act 2010 puts an equality duty on institutions and the public sector to bear in mind those obligations. Prevent is not a prescriptive duty: it does not say “You can't have people of an extremist nature”. What you have to bear in mind is that you must have a procedure within your safeguarding policies to make sure that you either mitigate it or ask yourself, as the institution or organising event, whether there is a danger of people expressing views that are likely to draw others into terrorism. ...

Q75 Ben Wallace: ... We have 23,000 people who are a cause for worry in this country—some with extremist mindsets, some formerly engaged in terrorist plots and some who have been of concern to the security services. ...

Q76 Ben Wallace: I absolutely want the ideology and the theology challenged. I do not want these people to get away with being unchallenged on some of the beliefs they espouse. That is why the Prevent duty is not about stopping these people being challenged on a platform. ...

Q77 Sam Gyimah: ... Freedom of speech should exist within the law. So long as it is within the law, we should be very careful about what we call controversial. Controversial could be an unpopular or unfashionable view. It could be a Member of Parliament who took a stand in Parliament on an issue that they genuinely believed in but that students at a particular university did not think was acceptable. I do not think it is the role of the Charity Commission or of the NUS to police what is and is not acceptable, because that leads to the politicisation of free speech. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/human-rights-committee/freedom-of-speech-in-universities/oral/78267.html>

Cabinet Office

Revised: Race Disparity Audit Summary Findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures website

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/680802/Revised_RDAEFAP_Feb_18.pdf

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Middle East: Peace Negotiations

Ben Lake (Plaid Cymru) [126304] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and

Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the decision of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation Central Council to suspend the Oslo agreement on progress towards a peace settlement.

Alistair Burt: The UK notes that the recommendations made by the Palestinian Central Council on 15 of January were non-binding. The Palestinian Authority continues to recognise the State of Israel and support a two-state solution. We continue to encourage the Palestinian leadership not to implement this recommendation. We urge all parties to promote non-violence, and engage constructively towards a two-state solution as the only basis for a sustainable settlement to the conflict.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-02/126304/>

Gaza: Violence

Jack Lopresti (Conservative) [126384] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 29 January 2018 to Question HL4713, on Gaza: Politics and Government, and the Answer of 11 January 2018 to Question 120721, on Israel: Gaza, what methods his Department has used to call upon that administration to refrain from violence.

Alistair Burt: We have not had any contact with the administration in Gaza: the UK retains a policy of no contact with Hamas in its entirety.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-02/126384/>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-01-15/HL4713/>

and

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

Hezbollah

Paul Scully (Conservative) [126411] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the role of Hezbollah in the Middle East peace process.

Alistair Burt: We are aware of Hassan Nasrallah's recent calls for a Palestinian intifada. The UK deplores all forms of incitement, including any comments that could stir up hatred and prejudice. We continue to urge all sides to avoid engaging in, or encouraging, any type of action and language that makes it more difficult to achieve a culture of peaceful coexistence and a negotiated solution to the conflict.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-02/126411/>

European Parliament Debate

Situation of UNRWA

Note that the abstract only includes speeches in English.

Federica Mogherini (Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy): ... the work [UNRWA] do is crucial for the prospects of an agreement between Israel and Palestine. It is a key contribution that UNWRA is bringing to the prospect of relaunching a credible peace process, because a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the refugee question is one of the parameters of for peace negotiations, with the ultimate objective of achieving a two—state solution. The work that UNWRA does provides the political space towards achieving a peace deal and

building a Palestinian State. ...

Reducing the activities of UNWRA would cause instability and even security threats all around the region. This is true for the West Bank and Gaza, but this is also true for Lebanon and Jordan. ...

... UNWRA is particularly important for the political process in Gaza, where work is ongoing, efforts are ongoing for the return of the Palestinian Authority, and Palestinian reconciliation is essential for the prospect of a viable state of Palestine. ...

Johannes Hahn (Member of the Commission): ... The European Union is convinced that the two-state solution is the only possible answer if we want to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East. We believe that any solution to the Israeli—Arab conflict will need to include an agreed just and fair solution to the refugee question. The Palestinian refugee question has existed for almost 70 years. The United Nations General Assembly established and mandated UNRWA to provide assistance and protection to registered Palestinian refugees until a just and lasting solution is found to their plight. ...

... the EU will not be able to compensate for substantial US cuts, given the pressure on available funds. We can and will actively assist UNRWA in reaching out to non—traditional donors in order to help the agency to broaden its donor base and, given the magnitude of the problem, we also need to work with host governments on how they might consider providing certain services that UNRWA cannot and maybe should not provide. ...

Linda McAvan (S&D): ... These people have a face, they want a future and find themselves as refugees ...

... we really must step up now. We must get other players to the table and get the funding guaranteed and get a long-term solution for UNRWA ... so there is a secure funding base on which we can restart peace talks. ...

Martina Anderson (GUE/NGL): ... initially designed to be a temporary one—year programme, 65 years later it is a damning indictment of the international community that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is still needed today. 5.6 million people are registered for services provided by UNRWA and there are hundreds of thousands more not registered but who still need UNRWA's help.

UNRWA works to protect the rights of Palestinians, rights that are routinely trampled on and discarded by Israel, as illustrated in the case of Ahd Tamimi, a 17—year—old Palestinian child who should be in school, not in a prison dungeon.

Yet we have the international community – disgracefully, I believe – lacking the political will to address the root causes of the conflict in Palestine. Given the lack of that will, it should at the very least work to protect the most vulnerable, and there is no doubt the children imprisoned in Palestine have gone way past vulnerability. ...

Johannes Hahn (Member of the Commission, on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy): ... Without UNRWA, millions of people, especially children, would lose access to essential services like education and health care.

We all are aware of what it means to lose one generation, or even several generations, if we fail to provide the necessary education and professional training and everything related to this. Such a failure might lead to radicalisation and other things which are definitely not in our, or the world's, interests in future.

Today, as many Members have said, UNRWA provides assistance and protection for more than five million Palestinian refugees. The European Union enjoys a strong and dynamic partnership with UNRWA. I see Pierre Krähenbühl at least twice to three times a year to discuss with him what needs to be done to improve UNRWA's performance in terms of the services it provides. We also discuss its internal structural needs and challenges and how UNRWA should be reformed. I can tell you that a lot of important measures have already taken. We should further support all the reform measures taken by UNRWA itself. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20180206+ITEM-017+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

Resolution adopted: Situation of UNRWA (2018/2553(RSP))

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2018-0042&language=EN&ring=P8-RC-2018-0085>

United Nations

Frank Dialogue Due on Peacekeeping's Future amid Evolving Threats, Growing Pressure, Top Officials Tell Special Committee as General Debate Begins

... Yaron Wax (Israel), spotlighting his country's long history in peacekeeping, said Israel was currently engaged with DPKO and the Department of Field Support, as well as in the fields of management and technical support. ... Member States must address the grave conclusions of the Cruz report, he said, stressing that "inaction is not an option". All peacekeepers must be equally well equipped and undergo pre-deployment training for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, which too often was not the case. ... He urged States to avoid the paralysis caused by focusing on differences of opinion. Instead, they should come together to implement practical changes based on the report's recommendations. ...

The representative of Syria clarified that his remarks regarding Israel's support of terrorists in the Golan Heights [*not cited in this press release*] were not accusations but proven realities. He rhetorically asked how to refer to an authority whose officials visited injured members of Al-Nusra — a terrorist organization — in hospital. The *Wall Street Journal* had reported on 18 June 2017 that Israel's support was regular and that the country provided arms, funds and immunities to terrorist groups. The same newspaper had published interviews with six terrorists, who affirmed that Israel's occupation army was in direct contact with terrorist organizations.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gapk231.doc.htm>

The Cruz Report, referred to above, can be read at

https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/improving_security_of_united_nations_peacekeepers_report.pdf

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Other Relevant Information

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

OSCE/ODIHR brings together police and Jewish community representatives to discuss security needs of Jewish communities in Poland

... The event brought together Polish law-enforcement officials and Jewish community representatives to raise awareness about the issues faced in ensuring security for Jewish communities, to discuss co-operation between law-enforcement agencies and Jewish communities in Poland, and to identify challenges, opportunities and recommendations for future co-operation.

"It is the responsibility of the government to make sure that Jewish communities are safe. At today's event, we can all jointly discuss how Polish government officials can confront specific challenges posed by anti-Semitism, and how they can build robust partnerships with Jewish communities to address their security concerns," said Katarzyna Gardapkhadze, ODIHR First Deputy Director.

At the event, ODIHR also launched the Polish version of its publication [*Understanding Anti-Semitic Hate Crime and Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities – A Practical Guide*](#), which details practical steps that governments can take, in co-operation with Jewish communities, to respond to and prevent anti-Semitic hate crimes and better address the security needs of these communities.

To read the full press release see

<http://www.osce.org/odihr/371406>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

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

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>

**** Creating a Parliament for Wales** (closing date 6 April 2018)

<http://senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?ID=292>

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