

Political Affairs Digest

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

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Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL5263] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment have they made of the Popular Conference of Palestinians Abroad, held in Istanbul in February 2017, which proposed a new national strategy for the Palestinians; and what support they intend to give to proposals for a new national leadership.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not made a specific assessment of this issue. The UK remains a leading donor to the Palestinian Authority and a strong supporter of its state-building efforts. As such we do not intend to provide support to proposals for a new Palestinian leadership. We remain committed to supporting a two-state solution as the only way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and encourage both parties to return to negotiations on this basis.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-01-30/HL5263/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL5264] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel regarding the sentencing by an Israeli court of five boys from Hares to 15 years imprisonment for throwing stones.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Whilst we have not raised this specific issue with the Israeli Government, we regularly discuss matters concerning the treatment of Palestinian minors in detention with the Israeli authorities.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-01-30/HL5264/>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN rights experts alarmed by detention of Palestinian girl for slapping Israeli soldier

UN human rights experts have expressed alarm over the case of Palestinian teenager Ahd Tamimi who, after an incident in which she slapped an Israeli soldier, appeared before an Israeli military court today. The experts called for her release during the proceedings and that future hearings be held in strict accordance with international legal standards. ...

“The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Israel has ratified, clearly states that children are to be deprived of their liberty only as a last resort, and only for the shortest appropriate period of time,” said Michael Lynk, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967.

“None of the facts of this case would appear to justify her ongoing detention prior to her trial, particularly given the concerns expressed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child about the use of pre-trial detention and detention on remand.”

The experts said states were obliged to explore as far as possible alternatives to detention, and to ensure that children are dealt with in a manner appropriate to their well-being.

They noted that Tamimi was arrested in the middle of the night by well-armed soldiers, and then questioned by Israeli security officials without a lawyer or family members present. “This violates the fundamental legal guarantee to have access to counsel during interrogation,” said José Guevara, Chair of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

The experts also expressed concern about her place of detention - Hasharon prison in Israel - in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention which states that the deportation of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the occupying power, or to that of any other country, is prohibited, regardless of the motive.

“Sadly, this is not an isolated case,” said Lynk. “Figures from Palestine show that Israel detains and prosecutes between 500 to 700 Palestinian children in military courts annually.

“We have received reports that these children are commonly mistreated while in detention, subjected to both physical and psychological abuse, deprived of access to lawyers or family members during interrogation, and tried under a military court system in which there are significant concerns regarding independence and impartiality, and which has a worryingly high conviction rate.” ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22654&LangID=E>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Hezbollah

John Howell (Conservative) [126775] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of proscribing the political wing of Hezbollah as a result of the comments made by Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem that the organisation does not maintain a military and a political wing.

Ben Wallace: The UK distinguishes between the political and military wings of Hizballah. The UK proscribed Hizballah’s External Security Organisation in March 2001 and in 2008 the proscription was extended to Hizballah’s military apparatus. We do not routinely comment on whether an organisation is or is not under consideration for proscription.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-06/126775/>

Religious Freedom

Gavin Shuker (Labour Co-op) [126668] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the timetable is for the publication of the Government’s freedom of religion or belief strategy.

Mark Field: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is developing a work-plan and has a "toolkit" which supports our work to promote and defend freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). The toolkit is published and can be seen at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561516/Freedom_of_Religion_or_Belief_Toolkit_-_2016.pdf.

The work-plan addresses activity at multilateral human rights fora and in our bilateral diplomatic engagement with other states, as well as project work. Because of the sensitivities of some of the material contained, it would not be appropriate to publish the work.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126668/>

Religious Freedom

Gavin Shuker (Labour Co-op) [126669] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in what way his Department is using the responses from HM Ambassadors and High Commissioners to its correspondence on their work to advance freedom of religion or belief in order to inform his Department's work in that area.

Mark Field: The responses we received from Her Majesty's Ambassadors and High Commissioners to our letters of 27 October 2017 and 28 November 2017 set out the main current and planned activities of their respective Embassies and High Commissions in the defence and promotion of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Officials will follow the progress of these activities and will evaluate outcomes in due course.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126669/>

Religious Freedom

Gavin Shuker (Labour Co-op) [126670] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many and which HM Ambassadors and High Commissioners responded to the letters that his Department sent asking them to report on their work to advance freedom of religion or belief.

Mark Field: So far ten heads of mission have formally responded to the letters Lord Ahmad and I sent. We have received substantive replies from Embassies or High Commissions in Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126670/>

Religious Freedom

Gavin Shuker (Labour Co-op) [126672] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to use information from Stabilisation Unit meetings on enhancing understanding of freedom of religion or belief to inform (a) Government programmes and (b) the work of UK overseas posts to improve the way in which patterns of religious persecution are tackled.

Mark Field: The Stabilisation Unit works with Government Departments to facilitate cross-government conflict assessments which seek to understand the key characteristics of conflicts. Freedom of religion or belief is considered as part of this framework where relevant. These assessments inform wider Government programming, policy making, and posts are able to draw on them to inform their programme work.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126672/>

Religious Freedom

Gavin Shuker (Labour Co-op) [126673] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and

Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to feed information gathered from roundtable meetings with civil society on freedom of religion or belief into its policy and programmes.

Mark Field: The FCO minister of state with responsibilities for human rights, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, has hosted two roundtables to date. The first, on 23 October, looked at Burma in the light of the Rohingya crisis. The second, on 12 December, examined the role of women in tackling religiously motivated violent extremism. These roundtables have been excellent opportunities to hear the perspectives and insights of faith leaders.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126673/>

Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon (DUP) [126758] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make freedom of belief a priority policy for his Department.

Mark Field: The protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is a priority of Her Majesty's Government's foreign policy and will continue to be so. Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers and Officials regularly raise individual cases and highlight practices and laws that discriminate against people on the basis of their religion or belief.

The United Kingdom also actively promotes FoRB through multilateral diplomacy. At the last session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the United Kingdom worked to maintain consensus on the adoption and implementation of the European Union sponsored Resolution on 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation sponsored Resolution on 'Combating Religious Intolerance'. Through the Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy, the FCO also continues to support a number of projects to promote tolerance. Current projects include work to promote religious tolerance through secondary school curricula in Iraq, Morocco and Lebanon.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126758/>

Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon (DUP) [126759] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when he plans to publish the Government's freedom of religion or belief strategy.

Mark Field: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is developing a work-plan and has a "toolkit" which guides our work to promote and defend freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). The toolkit is published and can be seen at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561516/Freedom_of_Religion_or_Belief_Toolkit_-_2016.pdf

The work-plan is for internal use only and there are no plans to publish it.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126759/>

Religious Freedom

Jim Shannon (DUP) [126760] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how his Department is using the responses from Ambassadors and High Commissioners to its letters on what they are doing to advance freedom of religion or belief to inform his Department's work in that area.

Mark Field: The responses received from Her Majesty's Ambassadors and High Commissioners to our letters of 27 October 2017 and 28 November 2017 set out the main current and planned activities of their respective Embassies and High Commissions in the defence and promotion of freedom of religion or belief

(FoRB). The responses give examples of how those Embassies and High Commissions are using a variety of diplomatic and programme tools to further defend and promote FoRB. Officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Human Rights Policy Unit will follow the progress of activities set out in those responses, and will evaluate outcomes in due course.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-02-05/126760/>

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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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