

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 Lords Oral Answers

Gaza

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated): To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of living conditions in Gaza.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Lord Bates): My Lords, the UK is very concerned about Gaza. We assess that around 1.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Households are receiving only five to six hours of electricity per day, there is limited access to safe water and power shortages are impeding health provision.

Baroness Tonge: My Lords, I am glad that the Minister has such an understanding of what is going on in Gaza. Let me add that it is so good to see him in his place. ... However, with all these things that we hear are going on in Gaza, does the Minister agree that its people have now for 10 years been suffering cruel and degrading treatment, which amounts to the collective punishment of nearly 2 million people, more than half of whom are children? How long must this go on? How long will it be before our Government take some action?

Lord Bates: We are taking immediate action in the sense that we are providing humanitarian aid. The assistance that we are providing to UNRWA is helping some 1.1 million of the 1.9 million people who are there, but I have to say that the parties to the conflict must be the parties to the solution. There is an opportunity here in Gaza for its people to recognise the state of Israel, to renounce violence and to accept the agreements that are there to allow the situation to normalise and progress, as has happened in the Palestinian Authority areas. It is a desperate situation and we call on all those people to put the children, the women and the people of Gaza at the heart of their concerns.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, the Minister mentioned UNRWA. We know that at the end of last year the US threatened its funding of UNRWA, which does such vital work. The EU and United Kingdom are the second and third biggest funders. What discussions have the UK Government had with the US Government to ensure that they do not follow through on the threat of withdrawing such significant funds from UNRWA?

Lord Bates: Our understanding is that of \$125 million due to be paid to UNRWA in January, \$65 million was withheld. We have made the consequences of doing that very clear to our US friends. We have also made clear our strong support for UNRWA. At the same time, the US rightly points out that it is responsible for a

significant proportion of UNRWA's budget. Whereas the UK, France, Germany and Saudi Arabia contribute around \$60 million to \$70 million, the US contributes some \$360 million. The US has said that it wants more countries that are expressing concern about Gaza to reach into their pockets and put money into the situation as well. We continue to hope that the situation will be resolved very quickly, as we believe that the longer it goes on, the more damage it does to the people of Gaza and the Palestinian refugees for whom UNRWA is responsible.

Baroness Warsi (Conservative): My Lords, is my noble friend familiar with the case of Ahd Tamimi, the teenage Palestinian girl currently in custody and subject to a trial behind closed doors? Have any representations been made by Her Majesty's Government in relation to this detained teenager? Do they have any concerns about reports that she may be subjected to sexual violence while in detention?

Lord Bates: Those are very serious concerns. We are aware of the case. My noble friend will be aware, from her former distinguished role in the Foreign Office, that representations have been made. They have certainly been made at a diplomatic level. I believe they have also been made at a ministerial level but I will correct that if it is not the case. We remain very concerned about the situation and will be seeking its urgent resolution.

Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat): What representations have been made to the Israeli Government about the 54 Palestinian patients who, according to the World Health Organization, died while awaiting permits to exit Gaza for medical treatment in 2017?

Lord Bates: We continue to work through that, most importantly by trying to ease the effect of those restrictions. We are major funders of a body called the UN Access Coordination Unit. We are trying to work through that body to ensure that the majority of people who need medical treatment get access to it in a timely manner. But we remain very concerned about those reports. ...

Lord Green of Deddington (Crossbench): My Lords, as a former chairman of Medical Aid for Palestinians, I entirely endorse the remarks of the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge. Do the Government realise the appalling effect of conditions in Gaza on Arab and Muslim opinion throughout the world? Do they give sufficient priority, effort and importance to tackling this abysmal situation? It has gone on for 10 or 20 years and it is appalling.

Lord Bates: I certainly echo the view that it is absolutely appalling. The suffering in Gaza is a shame on humanity. Of course, the question then is: what do you do about it and who can unlock this process? We believe that the parties to the conflict have to come together and, in the interests of humanitarian need, resolve their differences. We believe that there is a possibility. We recognise that Israel has taken some steps down this road recently by easing some of the restrictions on access to construction materials. There has been some movement in Cairo in Egypt—of course, Egypt blocks the border to the south as well—where there have been some efforts at reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. All the elements are there. It is frustratingly close. To see so much suffering continuing is a tragedy.

Lord Grocott (Labour): My Lords, given that the Government's policy, and that of their predecessor, has for years rightly been to support a two-state solution, is it not something of an anomaly that we recognise only one state in the area? When will the Government give further consideration to the recommendation of this House's International Relations Committee, which was that we should consider recognition of the state of Palestine? That would be a very significant step forward and give long-overdue dignity to the Palestinian people. When will the Government move in that direction?

Lord Bates: It is a very sensitive situation and the noble Lord is right to raise the point. The answer to the very influential report that was prepared is to say that that recognition will come when we believe that it will contribute to helping the peace process. Our belief is that recognition at this stage would not be helpful in the Middle East peace process, continued work on which is our primary concern at this time.

House of Lords Written Answer

Gaza: Islamic State

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL5490] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the extent to which Islamic State groups and adherents are fuelling instability in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are concerned about reports of a rise in the number of Salafi groups in Gaza that sympathise or self-identify with Daesh. However, we understand these groups have a small support base. This highlights the urgent need for all relevant parties to reach an agreement that addresses the underlying causes of conflict in Gaza, restores security under the Palestinian Authority, and reduces the risk of radicalisation.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-02-07/HL5490/>

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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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