

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Rachel Maclean (Conservative): Last night, I and many colleagues across the House attended a huge demonstration to say “enough is enough” to anti-Semitism. What more can my right hon. Friend’s Department do to strongly send out the message to the Jewish community around the world that Britain is determined to stamp out this ancient hatred?

Boris Johnson: It is absolutely vital for everybody in this House to send out a very clear message that anti-Semitism anywhere is intolerable. I look to people on both sides of the Chamber to do that.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-03-27/debates/E31F019B-CAEE-4C6F-8832-154DBBA7E790/TopicalQuestions#contribution-FE5392C8-9675-4F48-A51B-C9068D43855C>

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House of Commons Oral Answer

Topical Questions: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

T2. **Richard Burden (Labour):** It is nearly two years since the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, said: “The closure of Gaza suffocates its people, stifles its economy and impedes reconstruction efforts. It is a collective punishment for which there must be accountability.” Will the Foreign Secretary or one of his ministerial colleagues tell me who is being held to account for that collective punishment, and what specific measures would the UK Government support to hold those responsible to account? [904608]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): As the hon. Gentleman knows well, the situation in Gaza remains of deep concern. It is a wretched situation. We continue to make representations to all parties who have an involvement with the governance of Gaza to improve the conditions. It is more than just one particular group, but we do make representations to the Israelis about the possibility of improving steadily the position in relation to Gaza. Nothing will be settled until we

get the agreement we want on the two-state solution.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-03-27/debates/E31F019B-CAEE-4C6F-8832-154DBBA7E790/TopicalQuestions#contribution-2DE749EC-D565-4BB0-A52C-643511B34D20>

House of Commons Written Answers

Ahed Tamimi

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) [133226] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions his Department has held with officials in the Israeli Government on the case of Ahed Tamimi since her court appearance on 12 March 2018; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt: Our Embassy to Tel Aviv continues to raise this case with the relevant Israeli authorities, most recently on 15 March.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-03-19/133226/>

Israel: Palestinians

Jim Shannon (DUP) [133340] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what support her Department is providing to projects facilitating peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis.

Alistair Burt: The UK is providing support to fund a people-to-people programme to help Israelis and Palestinians work together to achieve tangible improvements in their lives, foster inter-community understanding and help build constituencies for a just and peaceful political solution. This three year programme – People for Peaceful Change – will facilitate interaction between youth leaders, religious communities and strengthen co-operation in the health sector. Ultimately the only way to achieve coexistence is through a negotiated two-state solution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-03-20/133340/>

Gaza: Armed Conflict

Rosie Cooper (Labour) [133916] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the security situation in Gaza.

Alistair Burt: While the Foreign Secretary has not recently discussed this specific issue with his Israeli counterpart, our Embassy in Tel Aviv and our Consulate-General in Jerusalem frequently urge both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to take steps to improve conditions in Gaza. Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. We strongly condemn the recent attempted assassination of Prime Minister Hamdallah on 13 March, for which there is no justification. The UK continues to support the return of the legitimate Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We urge non-violence, dialogue and progress towards a sustainable Hamas-Fatah reconciliation and an improvement in the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-03-22/133916/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Israel-Palestine Conflict

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated): To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment

they have made of the importance of the right of return of Palestinian refugees to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): My Lords, as part of a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there needs to be a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the question of Palestinian refugees in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1515. Any such agreement must be demographically compatible with two states for two peoples. The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting Palestinian refugees, including through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, to which we have so far provided over £50 million in 2017-18.

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated): I thank the Minister for that response, but is the Minister aware of families like that of Haj Abdullah Shahata from Kuwaykat in Palestine who were driven from their homes and prosperous farms 70 years ago, and have been living in camps and temporary accommodation in Lebanon since then? Is he aware that the Lebanese Government continue to restrict Palestinians' right to work, prohibit them from owning property and refuse them access to healthcare and education, leaving them dependent on UNRWA, which has diminishing funds? Can he really be content to let this continue for another 70 years, or will the Palestinians be allowed the right of return to their homeland as prescribed in international law?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As I have already said in my original Answer, of course the importance of refugees returning to the Holy Land, to the Palestinian territories, is an important part of the peace resolution. Let me reassure the noble Baroness that, in terms of money and financing, as I have already said we remain committed to UNRWA and continue to provide support. We also continue to provide financial support to the Palestinian Authority. This financial support allows for the education for the next generation, which I know is a priority for the noble Baroness. While I fully acknowledge the challenge of the Palestinian refugees, particularly those living in camps, from a UK perspective we remain committed to the two-state solution and also committed to supporting UNRWA in its efforts.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, the Minister keeps mentioning UNRWA, but the President of the United States has decided that the Palestinians' position needs to be punished and that there needs to be some form of retribution because of their decision over Jerusalem. What are the Government doing to persuade the US that punishing the Palestinians is not the right way forward, and that we should be working together as allies to support UNRWA? Have the Government had any discussions at Foreign Office level with the new national security adviser and the new Secretary of State, both of whom have taken positions that could make life very difficult for the Palestinians?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I reassure the noble Lord that I speak for Her Majesty's Government, and the Government remain committed to a two-state solution and to UNRWA. Regarding the relationship with the United States, we continue to implore the United States, which is a key player in finding a lasting Middle East settlement, to engage fully with all parties and to continue engagement with both the Palestinians and the Israelis in finding a resolution to this crisis, which, as the noble Baroness has said, has gone on for far too long. In response to the question about specific meetings, most recently my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary has had discussions on a range of issues relating to foreign policy with American counterparts, and we continue to do so.

Baroness Deech (Crossbench): My Lords, does the Minister agree with me that this is a problem that need not exist? Of the 60 million refugees in the world, only the Palestinians are treated as refugees for generation after generation, when they should have been resettled in the lands where they are living now, as were the same number of Jews who were expelled from the Middle East in the late 1940s. It is time to call a halt to this artificial definition, which is destined to use people as bargaining chips.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The one point on which I will agree with the noble

Baroness is that it is important to find a resolution to this long-standing issue. The Palestinians, as the Jewish communities of Israel before them, have suffered for too long from being disassociated and removed from the holy lands. We need to find a lasting solution that is fair for both the Palestinian people and of course Israel.

Viscount Hailsham (Conservative): My Lords, I say to my noble friend that achieving the right of return is going to be extraordinarily difficult and probably impractical. What we can do is to urge upon the Government of Israel the importance of desisting from building settlements around Jerusalem. That could make a substantial contribution to a resolution of the conflict in the Middle East.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I agree with my noble friend. The issue of return in any refugee crisis that we have seen since time immemorial has always been challenging. I agree with him totally on the issue of settlements. Our position is clear: any settlement that is built in the Occupied Territories is illegal and against UN resolutions.

Lord Winston (Labour): My Lords, I declare an interest in this regard: I am a Zionist. Many of my family have been living in Israel since the 15th century after the persecution in Spain. Is it not fair to point out that one of the problems about the repatriation or readmittance of Palestinians is the firm resolve by so many of them to try to destroy the state of Israel? As long as that happens—the openly avowed intention is to ensure that Israel does not exist—that remains a very big problem in these negotiations.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Any party that believes in the destruction of Israel of course cannot be party to a peace process. The UK Government have made it clear that, before taking part in any peaceful negotiations on the two-state solution, any party at the negotiating table needs to agree the right of Israel to exist, so I agree with the noble Lord. Equally, I am sure he would agree with me that there are many on the Palestinian side who not only recognise Israel's right to exist but believe most passionately in the coexistence of Arabs, Jews, Christians and indeed all faiths and communities living peacefully side by side. That is what we believe the two-state solution provides.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, on the question of taking forward a two-state solution, does the Minister not feel that the UK should recognise Palestine, as most other countries in the world do?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: It has been the position of Her Majesty's Government that we will recognise officially the state of Palestine when we feel that would be most constructive and progressive to ensuring a peaceful resolution to the conflict, which has gone on for too long. At the same time, we also recognise the right of Palestinian children and Palestinian people to get support in terms of health and education, and we continue to support them and the Palestinian Authority in that regard.

Lord Hylton (Crossbench): My Lords, does the Minister accept that the Palestinian refugee population—particularly in the neighbouring countries, as mentioned by the noble Baroness—has been consistently excluded from all political negotiation? Therefore, would Her Majesty's Government favour consultation with those people to discover what are their own wishes? Could UNRWA, as their friend, advocate and protector, be allowed at least observer status?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We continue to abide by the agreement reached at the UN for a two-state solution. The Palestinian people, including the Palestinian refugees, are represented and their views are known by the Palestinian representatives in the peace negotiations.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-03-27/debates/4ED6C623-13B9-4B62-B397-1012AF9A6477/Israel-PalestineConflict>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel Defense Forces: British Nationals Abroad

Baroness tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL6335] To ask Her Majesty's Government how many British citizens are currently serving in the Israel Defence Force.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Government has made no assessment of the number of British or British-Israeli citizens serving in the Israel Defence Forces.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-03-13/HL6335/>

Hebron: Israel

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL6337] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the status of Palestinians living in the part of Hebron City, known as H2, which is directly controlled by Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not raised this specific issue with the Israeli authorities.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-03-13/HL6337/>

Hebron: Israel

Baroness tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL6338] To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of Israel about why Palestinians in the South Hebron Hills are being prevented from accessing and working their land.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not had any discussions with the Israeli authorities on this issue. We remain deeply concerned, however, about restrictions on freedom of movement within the West Bank.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-03-13/HL6338/>

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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>

Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/holocaustreturnofculturalobjectsamendment.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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 9 days**

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

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

Integrated Communities Strategy green paper (closing date 5 June 2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper>

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