

Political Affairs Digest

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

Contents

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Israel

House of Commons Written Answer

Palestinians: Radicalism

Jim Shannon (DUP) [134419] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 16 March 2018 to Question 132437, whether the culture of honouring people as martyrs within Palestinian society contributes to regional tensions and extremism and retards progress towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Alistair Burt: The glorification of terrorists as "martyrs" is a barrier to peace. It is important the Palestinian leadership continue efforts to implement fully the recommendations of the Quartet Report regarding incitement. But we are encouraged by President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority's track record, which shows a commitment to non-violence and a negotiated two-state solution. We have a regular dialogue with both the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel in which we reiterate the need for both sides to prepare their populations for peaceful coexistence, including by promoting a more positive portrayal of each other.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-03-27/134419/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-03-13/132437/>

United Nations

UN calls for restraint ahead of renewed Palestinian protests at Gaza fence

... UN Secretary-General António Guterres called upon all [parties on the ground to avoid confrontation and exercise maximum restraint](#).

"I particularly urge Israel to exercise extreme caution with the use of force in order to avoid casualties. Civilians must be able to exercise their right to demonstrate peacefully," he stressed.

The UN chief also highlighted the urgency to accelerate efforts to "return to meaningful negotiations that will eventually allow Palestinians and Israelis to live in two democratic states side by side in peace and within secure and recognized borders." ...

Echoing the Secretary-General, Nikolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process also [called upon Israeli forces to exercise restraint and on the Palestinians to avoid friction](#) at the Gaza fence. ...

“Civilians, particularly children, must not be intentionally put in danger or targeted in any way,” he added. ...

Some of the casualties were reportedly the result of live ammunition used by Israeli security forces during the March. Other casualties followed armed clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces, including the shelling of a Hamas observation point.

There were also reports from Israeli security forces of militants attempting to get through the fence in an attempt to plant explosives. Palestinians also reportedly sent a nine-year-old girl through the fence, but Israeli forces were able to send her safely back. ...

Quoting partners on the ground, a UN spokesperson said today that supplies of essential drugs and medical disposables are running low at health facilities in the enclave while an ongoing electricity crisis that has hampered the functioning of hospitals.

“There are currently zero stock levels for nearly half of the list of essential drugs and for a quarter of the list of essential [medical] disposables in Gaza,” Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesperson of the UN Secretary-General, said ...

“An estimated \$1 million is urgently required to support the health system in Gaza for drugs, disposables, equipment, gases and lab materials in the coming 6 to 8 weeks,” he added, noting that humanitarian partners are working to prioritize urgently required medical items and coordinating the disbursement of supplies in preparation for the expected medical increased needs.

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1006661>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN rights experts condemn Israel’s response to Palestinian protests in Gaza

... “International law sets strict prohibitions on the use of force by law enforcement officials,” said the human rights experts, who echoed a call by the UN Secretary General for an investigation into Israel’s response. The experts expressed deep concern at reports that Israel’s Minister of Defense stated that there will not be any inquiry into Israel’s actions.

“The Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials require law enforcement officials to refrain from using lethal force on demonstrators unless strictly unavoidable in order to protect their own or others’ lives – their safety must be in actual danger,” the experts said.

“There is no available evidence to suggest that the lives of heavily armed security forces were threatened ... Israel has ignored repeated demands by the international community to credibly investigate and prosecute substantial allegations of wrongful killings by its security forces,” ...

A number of the dead and wounded were shot in their upper bodies while at considerable distances from the Israeli security forces, the experts noted, expressing concern at the apparent disregard for the lives of Palestinian protesters. They noted that wilful killing or serious injury of the protected population amounts to grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The experts also noted with alarm reports that the Israeli Defence Forces posted the following message on its twitter feed on Saturday with respect to the events on Friday: “Nothing was carried out uncontrolled; everything was accurate and measured, and we know where every bullet landed.”

The experts remind the Government of Israel that peaceful protest is a legitimate exercise of the rights of freedom of expression, assembly, and association, and that

Israel, as the occupying power, is obligated to protect and to respect the human rights of the Palestinians living in occupied Gaza. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22924&LangID=E>

Press briefing note on Gaza

Given the deplorable killing of 16 people and the injuring of reportedly more than 1,000 others during protests in Gaza, mostly on 30 March, we are gravely concerned that further violence could occur during demonstrations today and in the coming weeks. ...

Given the large number of injuries and deaths, the ominous statements made by Israeli authorities in the days leading up to the protest, as well as indications that the individuals killed or wounded were unarmed or did not pose a serious threat to well-protected security forces – and in some cases were actually running away from the fence – there are strong indications that security forces used excessive force.

In policing the green-line fence, Israeli security forces are required by international human rights law to respect the rights to peaceful assembly and expression and to use, to the extent possible, non-violent means to discharge their duties. In accordance with international human rights law, firearms may be used only in cases of extreme necessity, as a last resort, and in response to an imminent threat of death or risk of serious injury. ...

An attempt to approach or cross the green-line fence by itself certainly does not amount to a threat to life or serious injury that would justify the use of live ammunition.

We remind Israel of its obligations to ensure that excessive force is not employed against protestors and that in the context of a military occupation, as is the case in Gaza, the unjustified and unlawful recourse to firearms by law enforcement resulting in death may amount to a wilful killing, a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We echo the call by the UN Secretary-General for an independent and transparent investigation into these incidents, with a view to holding accountable those responsible.

We also call on leaders on both sides to do all in their power to prevent further injuries and loss of life.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22925&LangID=E>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Religious Freedom

Nigel Dodds (DUP) [134398] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief on his work.

Mark Field: The Foreign Secretary has not had any recent discussions with Mr Ján Figel, the EU's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. However, a senior official from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office met Mr Figel along with counterparts from other EU member states for a day of discussions on improving the protection of Freedom of Religion and Belief internationally on 11 January 2018.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-03-27/134398/>

TOP

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>

TOP

Consultations ** new or updated today

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

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

TOP

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