

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 Commons Oral Answer

Prime Minister's Questions: Anti-Semitism

Ian Duncan Smith (Conservative): ... I sat in the Chamber and listened to [yesterday's] debate [on Anti-Semitism], including the two appalling testimonies from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and particularly from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth), which were deeply moving. They were horrifying in the sense of the abuse that those hon. Members have faced, but also uplifting in the sense of the bravery that they have shown in tackling their abusers. Does my right hon. Friend agree that what came out of yesterday's debate was that there should be absolutely no place in any political party for anyone who is an anti-Semite and that, just as importantly, any apologists for anti-Semites should be kicked out of their party as well?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. It is incredibly important for us and for the political parties in this country to show a clear signal that we will not accept or tolerate anti-Semitism in any form. I have made reference to a number of the speeches that were made yesterday, and I also join my right hon. Friend in commending those Members, particularly the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent North and for Liverpool, Wavertree, who have suffered incredible abuse as a result of this anti-Semitism but who have also shown incredible bravery in being willing to stand up and set that out to the House. Theirs was a fine example of the best of this House of Commons and the best of Members of Parliament.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-04-18/debates/7AC4C401-CE7F-4F4B-BD08-A9526818E2F3/Engagements#contribution-CE220388-1196-4BC3-B289-3DB1728E3C14>

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Holocaust

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Sir Eric Pickles and Ed Balls appointed as co-chairs of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation Advisory Board

The UK's Special Envoy for post-Holocaust Issues, the Rt Hon Sir Eric Pickles and the former Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, the Rt Hon Ed Balls, have today (18 April 2018) been appointed by the Prime Minister as co-chairs of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation Advisory Board. They replace Sir Peter Bazalgette chairman of the Board since 2015.

The advisory board is supporting the delivery of the UK's new Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre that is proposed for Victoria Tower Gardens beside the Houses of Parliament.

Co-chair Sir Eric Pickles said: ... I am very much looking forward to working alongside Ed. Together we will work to produce a memorial and a learning space that will enhance and complement existing work by government and organisations supporting Holocaust remembrance. Its location next to Parliament emphasises the importance the UK places in remembering mass murder that defined the twentieth century.

Co-chair Ed Balls said: We all share a great responsibility across society to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are never forgotten, and over the last 4 years, as a member of the Holocaust Commission and then the Foundation, I have been inspired by the survivors I have met and deeply moved by their testimonies. I'm therefore honoured to be appointed co-chair of the Foundation with Sir Eric. ...

Welcoming their appointment, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said: ... I look forward to working with them to deliver a world class memorial and learning centre. It will not only honour and remember all victims and survivors of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides, but educate future generations on the importance of fighting prejudice and persecution in all its forms. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sir-eric-pickles-and-ed-balls-appointed-as-co-chairs-of-the-uk-holocaust-memorial-foundation-advisory-board>

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Israel

House of Commons Oral Answers

Topical Questions: International Development

T2. Richard Burden (Labour): The Minister of State is one of 57 Members who over the years have visited the village of Khan al-Ahmar and its primary school, which was built with international assistance. Does he know that, one week today, that school could be destroyed as a result of a court hearing to make way for an illegal Israeli settlement expansion? Does he agree that the UK Government should make urgent representations to the Government of Israel that such action would contravene international law? [904717]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): The hon. Gentleman is right—I have indeed visited the school and the village. The UK has made repeated representations on this particular possibility of demolition and I assure him that we will continue to do so as a matter of urgency.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-04-18/debates/162DC722-C194-4C26-90CD-E033FBB891A5/TopicalQuestions#contribution-F97B40CE-7B5C-41CC-A095-184A38CAB16D>

Topical Questions: International Development

T5. Andrew Bowie (Conservative): In the last few weeks, there has sadly been an increase in tension and violence on the Israel-Gaza border. Just last weekend, Israel destroyed a cross-border tunnel that Hamas had built to attack Israeli civilians. I happen to have seen that those tunnels involve a huge amount of construction materials, so what is the Minister doing to ensure that no UK aid is being diverted to fund those terrible tunnels? [904720]

Alistair Burt: We are well aware of this threat. We support the materials monitoring unit of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, which oversees the approval, entry and use of materials for reconstruction. We regularly audit spending to ensure that there is no diversion in the manner that my hon. Friend raised.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-04-18/debates/162DC722-C194-4C26-90CD-E033FBB891A5/TopicalQuestions#contribution-580C3B78-EC42-47A5-B8A3-CC9815840D7A>

House of Commons Written Answers

Overseas Trade: Occupied Territories

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Labour Co-op) [135452] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 3 April 2018 to Question 133853 on Occupied Territories, what assessment he has made of whether trade between British businesses and Israeli entities in the Occupied Territories is consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2234.

Alistair Burt: UN Security Council Resolution 2234 refers to Cyprus, and not Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The UK did however vote for UN Security Council Resolution 2334, in line with our support for a two-state solution. The resolution calls on all states to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Ultimately the decision to operate in settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is for each individual or company. It has long been our position that Israeli settlement activity is illegal and undermines the viability of two states for two peoples.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-13/135452/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-03-22/133853/>

Palestinians: Terrorism

The following three questions all received the same answer

Joan Ryan (Labour) [135640] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies on UK aid to the Palestinian Authority of the decision by that Authority to pay directly the salaries of convicted terrorists.

Joan Ryan (Labour) [135641] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking in response to the Palestinian Authority's announcement that it will revert to directly paying the salaries of convicted terrorists.

Joan Ryan (Labour) [135642] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions she has had with the Palestinian Authority on the decision by that Authority to revert to paying directly the salaries of convicted terrorists.

Alistair Burt: At the time of responding to this question, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has not yet confirmed or announced that it will provide payments to

Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails directly. UK officials are in contact with the PA to monitor the situation and the British Consul-General in Jerusalem is planning to meet with a senior Palestinian representative as soon as possible to discuss this.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-13/135640/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-13/135641/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-13/135642/>

Palestinians: Education

Joan Ryan (Labour) [135724] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her Department's press release, Explaining British support for Palestinian education, published on 1 April 2018, how her Department plans to conduct the assessment of the Palestinian curriculum; and what plans she has to publish that assessment.

Alistair Burt: The UK has brought forward its planned thorough assessment of the Palestinian curriculum which will take some months to conclude. This will include a rigorous and independent review of the new pilot PA textbooks. Appropriate findings from this assessment will be released in due course.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-13/135724/>

The press release referred to above can be read at

<https://dfidnews.blog.gov.uk/2018/04/01/explaining-british-support-for-palestinian-education/>

Palestinians: Education

Joan Ryan (Labour) [135725] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her Department's press release, Explaining British support for Palestinian education, published on 1 April 2018, what steps her Department plans to take if there is evidence of material that incites violence in the Palestinian curriculum.

Alistair Burt: The UK has brought forward its planned independent assessment of the Palestinian curriculum. We will raise any unacceptable material directly with the Palestinian Authority (PA) Minister for Education and Higher Education and continue working with the Ministry to support a high quality education for Palestinian children including through its curriculum. Our sustained support to the PA means we have a robust relationship with senior PA ministers, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding which includes requirements for the PA to commit to the principle of non-violence and address allegations of incitement in the education curriculum.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-13/135725/>

The press release referred to above can be read at

<https://dfidnews.blog.gov.uk/2018/04/01/explaining-british-support-for-palestinian-education/>

Israel: Arms Trade

Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op) [135726] To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, how many UK arms export licenses have been granted to Israel in each of the last five years.

Graham Stuart: The following numbers of licences to Israel have been granted for military rated goods for each of the last five years:

2013 - 180 licences

2014 - 150 licences

2015 - 181 licences
2016 - 192 licences
2017 - 169 licences

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-13/135726/>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Boris Johnson: Mazal Tov from the UK to the State of Israel on its 70th anniversary. Israel is a close friend and ally, and our relationship continues to go from strength to strength

<https://twitter.com/BorisJohnson/status/986916621603299329>

United Nations

UN official calls on Israel to halt plans to relocate Palestinian Bedouin communities in West Bank

We are monitoring the situation in Khan al Ahmar closely and are [deeply concerned](#) by what we see here, and in the scores of other vulnerable Bedouin communities,” UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick said.

Mr. McGoldrick visited the Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu, located on the outskirts of East Jerusalem in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with Scott Anderson, the UN Relief and Works Agency’s Director of Operations in the West Bank, and Palestinian officials.

“We call on the Israeli authorities to respect their legal obligations, as the occupying power, including through stopping the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and ceasing plans for the relocation of Palestinian Bedouin communities,” Mr. McGoldrick stressed.

Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu is home to 181 people, 53 per cent of whom are children and 95 per cent of whom are Palestine refugees registered with the UN agency.

It is one of 46 Bedouin communities in the central West Bank that the UN considers being at risk of forcible transfer, due to a coercive environment generated by Israeli practices and policies, plans to move the communities from their current locations and other reasons.

Eighteen of these communities, including Khan al Ahmar, are located in or next to an area slated in part for a settlement plan – reportedly aimed at creating a continuous built-up area between Ma’ale Adumim and East Jerusalem.

Nearly all of the Khan al Ahmar community’s structures risk demolition by the Israeli authorities, including the school, initially built with donor support that serves some 170 students from the community and four surrounding ones, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

“The entire community of Khan el Ahmar-Abu al Helu, the vast majority of whom are Palestine refugees and who are amongst the most vulnerable Bedouin communities in the West Bank, is facing the risk of demolitions of their structures and relocation,” said Mr. Anderson.

For years, the residents have insisted on the right to return to their original lands, in what is now southern Israel, and, until this occurs, asks for international support to remain in their current location.

“The humanitarian impact of home demolition is severe and long lasting. It is well documented in previous instances that the transfer of Bedouin communities into urban settings is socially and economically non-viable. The Khan al Ahmar-Abu al Helu community has repeatedly called for the provision of suitable planning solutions and services in its current location,” Mr. Anderson added.

The visit came in advance of next week's Israeli High Court of Justice case, which may determine the fate of the structures and Israeli relocation plan.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1007622>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Oral Answers

Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Religion

Lord Suri (Conservative): To ask Her Majesty's Government what director level staffing changes, if any, they intend to make in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to provide greater capacity for that department to co-ordinate, oversee and deliver policy to advance freedom of religion and belief.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: My Lords, the deputy director of the multilateral policy directorate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office leads all FCO work at official level to promote freedom of religion or belief. Ambassadors and high commissioners lead work abroad in promoting and defending human rights including freedom of religion or belief, taking account of the situation in their host countries. In their day-to-day work, many desk officers in London and staff in the overseas network contribute to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief. I can confirm that we have no current plans to appoint new staff to work on freedom of religion or belief at director level.

Lord Suri: I thank the Minister for her response. I am also pleased to see that several FCO and DfID country posts have responded positively to the letters sent by the Minister, Mark Field, and my noble friends Lord Ahmad and Lord Bates asking that they outline the strategic steps that they are taking to support and advance freedom of religion or belief at country level. Will she explain what resources and efforts are being applied to ensure that the steps outlined are carried out effectively and that country-specific strategies to advance freedom of religion or belief are being co-ordinated, developed, shared between posts and implemented effectively?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: We have received updates from a variety of UK missions on how they are promoting freedom of religion or belief. Resources and efforts will vary across these posts as each country faces its own set of unique challenges, and our freedom of religion or belief work needs to be tailored to suit the local context. Our interventions range from diplomatic interventions, our work at the Human Rights Council, dialogue and project support. Officials from the human rights policy unit remain in contact with the relevant leads, follow the progress of activities and share best practice.

Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench): My Lords, has the Minister seen, in advance of this week's Commonwealth Heads of Government conference meeting in London, that 95% of citizens of the Commonwealth have religious beliefs but that in 70% of Commonwealth countries there is some degree of persecution on the basis of freedom of religion or belief? How is it commensurate with that challenge to have only two desk officers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office dealing with this issue? How is it commensurate with our obligations under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which upholds the right of every citizen to believe, not to believe or to change their belief?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: I am delighted to hear that more than 90% of people in the Commonwealth have a religious belief; that is excellent. It is disturbing that 70% are unable to express it in the way that we would all want. On the noble Lord's point about resources, I in no way wish to make light of this, but I cannot

think that there is a government department that does not want more resources to do things. I cannot answer his question in as much detail as he would like, but I will go away, find out more information and let him have it. I just put in a plea that resources are tight in the current fiscal climate, but by 2019-20, the overall resource budget will be £1.24 billion.

The Lord Bishop of Coventry: My Lords, following on from that question, the Minister will be aware of the gathering at Lambeth Palace at the moment convened by my most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury, which is bringing together parliamentarians and religious leaders from across the Commonwealth to help them work on good local practice. Would not the sort of director-level appointment mentioned in the Question to increase capacity help Her Majesty's Government to partner with such initiatives to take them on to the next stage and provide co-ordination across the Commonwealth?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: I congratulate the Church on hosting today's meeting with people from across the Commonwealth and I am sure that they will gain much from it. When I was the chief executive of a charity and people asked for resources, I used to say, "I get the message", so I get the message on a director-level appointment. The only thing I can confirm to give any comfort at this point is that we are actively reviewing the need for such a post.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Ahmad, has made this a political priority. He is the Minister for Human Rights. I return to the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Alton: to have two desk members covering this issue is simply not good enough. If it is a priority, the Government should ensure that they can deliver on it. The fact is that 80% of the world's population live in countries where oppression of religious belief takes place. That oppression ends in other human rights abuses. We should be prioritising this because we need to create a tolerant world.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: I completely agree with the noble Lord that we want a tolerant world. I completely agree that we must do everything we can to ensure that people have freedom of religion. On the face of it—I do not doubt what the noble Lord says—two desk people appears remarkably light. I could get in big trouble afterwards for agreeing with him on that, but noble Lords are all very kind to me. The Leader is laughing; I am all right.

My noble friend Lord Ahmad is absolutely committed to this agenda. He believes in it and there can be nobody better to be fighting this corner. I absolutely confirm that it is important and I hope the noble Lord will leave it with me.

Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, to spare the Minister's blushes, there are not even two full-time FCO officers; there are two part-time members of staff. To keep my question very brief, you cannot have a priority unless it is properly funded. Things may be tight, but how will the Government demonstrate that this is a real priority and fund the necessary posts?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: It gets better. Let me say to the noble Baroness, it is a priority—I would not say that if it was not true. I do not want to repeat myself, but I will talk to people about the resources. It occurs to me, if I have got my facts correct, that we may have desk positions in London—part-time, as the noble Baroness points out—but we also have staff in other posts around the world, part of whose job is to promote and support freedom of religion. The resource-light situation that we are talking about may not be as bad as that, but I have got the message.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-04-18/debates/AA0C99F5-D776-4F7E-AB58-A628C3999640/ForeignAndCommonwealthOfficeReligion>

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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>

Report Stage, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-04-18/debates/D572CBF6-A85C-4208-B426-843747A766FA/EuropeanUnion\(Withdrawal\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-04-18/debates/D572CBF6-A85C-4208-B426-843747A766FA/EuropeanUnion(Withdrawal)Bill)

Notice of amendments

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2017-2019/0079/18079-R-l\(a\).pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2017-2019/0079/18079-R-l(a).pdf)

and

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2017-2019/0079/18079-R-l\(b\).pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2017-2019/0079/18079-R-l(b).pdf)

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

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

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

Home Education (closing date 2 July 2018)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-a/>

Ecclesiastical exemption and guidance on scheduled monuments (closing date 13 July 2018)

<https://beta.gov.wales/ecclesiastical-exemption-and-guidance-scheduled-monuments>

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