

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 Point of Order

John Mann (Labour): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. After a debate on anti-Semitism a week ago today, I have received very many kind remarks from parliamentarians, their staff and, indeed, members of House staff, for which me and my family are very grateful. There is an exception to that: one member of the Press Lobby chose to put out on social media, without any communication whatsoever with me, the suggestion that I had misled Parliament in relation a criminal act of violence against my wife. May I repeat, on the record, that I have not misled Parliament and that my wife, who was the victim of this crime, has written to the media outlet concerned today clarifying this in some detail? This outrageous commentary has led to a wave of additional abuse against me, against my wife and against my daughter, including a threat of violence from a Labour party member from Sefton that is being referred to the police. Can you confirm my understanding that members of the Press Lobby have a privileged status within here? They have computers, telephones and lists of MPs, and if they are struggling to get hold of anybody they have the ability to wait outside this Chamber after a debate to speak to us. This member of the Press Lobby chose to use none of those things, and I just wanted your confirmation that the Press Lobby has the full ability to contact any of us, should they wish to do so, before putting out such scurrilous material.

Mr Speaker: I can confirm that. Any journalist can contact any Member if said journalist is minded to do so. I think it is as simple as that; I have no responsibility for what has been said, and the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that I do. To be candid, I have no knowledge of which individual or outlet he has in mind. In a way, that is an advantage; he is asking me a straightforward question and I can offer him a straightforward confirmation by way of reply.

Needless to say, I am very sorry to hear about the torrent of abuse that the hon. Gentleman, his wife and his daughter have experienced—that is very sad. Nothing is going to stop the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known for more than 30 years, from speaking his mind, and it is right that that should be so. But it is a pity when people feel it necessary not to play the ball but to play the man or the woman, indulging in ad hominem abuse of a frequently loathsome kind, and sometimes of a kind that would be of interest to the police. This is a very worrying development in our democracy, about which I have spoken before, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he has said and I hope my reply offers him some reassurance.

House of Commons Written Answer

Antisemitism

Tulip Siddiq (Labour) [136144] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what progress his Department has made in response to the 2015 recommendation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism on creating a database of symbols slogans and flags that may be illegal because the organisations that use them incite hatred.

Heather Wheeler: We are working with True Vision, the police online hate crime portal, and community stakeholders to provide an assessment of the impact symbols, slogans and flags have on community tensions. We expect the database to be in operation later this year.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-04-17/136144/>

Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Hate crime and its violent consequences

New written evidence

Crown Prosecution Service

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/written/81323.pdf>

Antisemitism Policy Trust

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/written/80711.pdf>

Oral evidence session

Q582 Lloyd Embley (Group Editor-in-Chief, Trinity Mirror): ... I think there are some issues raised by the word “offence”. ...

I wrote something down in my own words to try and encapsulate how I felt about this: “It’s important that I read things with which I fundamentally disagree: things which I don’t like; things that offend or repulse me. Doing so provides affirmation of my own beliefs and values.” And that is really important here. ...

Q583 Chair (Yvette Cooper, Labour): But my question is to you as editors, given your responsibility for the cumulative impact of the stories and the headlines in your papers. Do you think you have a responsibility to look at what its cumulative impact is on people who read it?

Lloyd Embley: Unquestionably—I have a responsibility and I have a responsibility to reflect and amplify the views of my readers. My readers, as a general rule, come from a left-of-centre perspective and if I carried some of that stuff, I would lose readers; it would not be very sensible. ...

Q584 Chair: Do you look at whether or not your coverage overall might, for example, incite hatred, increase prejudice or promote Islamophobia? ...

Paul Clarkson (Managing Editor, The Sun): Yes, we certainly do. We have quite a stringent pre and post-publication discussion, especially over some of the more contentious stories. We always try to balance the article 10 freedom of expression, which

we cherish extremely dearly in *The Sun*, with the greater responsibility and the impact of what we write. ...

Q585 Chair: ... Mr Embley, I think you said that your role is to “amplify the views of my readers”. That sounds a bit like one of the things we were challenging the social media companies on. We were challenging them on their algorithms and the way in which, whatever people are looking for, what they get further back and what they get recommended to them is something that becomes more polarised and more extreme. Are you really saying that your role is to amplify or to push further out the views of your readers?

Lloyd Embley: I don't think it is necessarily to push them further out. “Reflect” is perhaps a better word than “amplify”. ...

Q586 Chair: Given that all of you have said that these are issues that you take seriously and that you reflect on, do you think it is a concern that Baroness Warsi's research suggests that only 4% of articles that refer to Muslims are positive? Sir Alan Moses said, when we took evidence from IPSO, that, “there is a fundamental problem...which is the way people write about other groups and other religions and particularly...about Muslims.”

The UN High Commission on Refugees, which is looking particularly at refugees rather than at Islamophobia, describes coverage in the UK as being “by far the most polarised”, with some parts of the media being “uniquely aggressive” in their campaigns against migrants and talks about “decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion.” ...

Peter Wright (Editor Emeritus, Associated Newspapers): ... We go to great lengths to avoid any articles that could possibly contribute to Islamophobia, but you still have to report difficult issues. There have been claims of Islamophobia surrounding the reporting of sex grooming gangs in Rotherham and elsewhere. You cannot ignore the fact that these crimes appear to have a cultural background to them. You try to report them in a way that is even handed and sensible, but if you lean over backwards too far, you get to the point where you are not telling people about what is going on in our society.

The fear of being accused of Islamophobia can create its own problems. We and other newspapers, in trying to describe the activities of sex grooming gangs, have described those convicted in recent articles as Asian or of Asian background. That is correct up to a point, but we are now getting complaints from the Hindu and Sikh communities that that is tainting their communities with crimes with which they appear to have no involvement. ...

Q599 Tim Loughton (Conservative): ... In September of last year, there was a story that, to be fair, was initiated by *The Times*, but was then certainly taken up and embellished by the *Mail* under the headline “Christian girl forced into Muslim foster care”. The line you had taken previously was that there was political correctness just because they didn't share the heritage, culture or religion of the prospective foster carers and that was crazy. But here, you took the assumption that because this was supposedly a Christian girl—a five-year-old girl, referred to as AB, in Tower Hamlets—and the couple who were fostering her were Muslim, that was not appropriate. Why that inconsistency?

Peter Wright: I'm not sure it is an inconsistency. ...

Q603 Tim Loughton: ... When it subsequently turned out that you had doctored a photograph with which you took that *Times* story to give the supposed foster carer a head veil to make her look as Muslim as possible—

Peter Wright: No, hang on. It was to match the facts of the story as presented in *The Times*. ...

Q604 Tim Loughton: But you did not have a photograph of the foster mother wearing a head veil. You invented it.

Peter Wright: No, we didn't have any photograph. The photograph that was published was a stock photograph. ...

Q607 Tim Loughton: Do many people actually look for that small print suggesting that this in fact is a staged photograph? That photograph was there to create an image that a white Christian child had been “forced”, in the word that you used. To add to that, you had an article by Katie Hopkins, who—surprise, surprise—referred to it as “abuse” of this little girl. ...

Peter Wright: No, I’m sorry, I simply don’t accept that. ...

Q608 Peter Wright: This is a surprising story where a local authority appears to have adopted a completely different policy from what is currently the standard policy, which is that you do not place children into a family with a different cultural background. ...

Q609 Tim Loughton: ... as the facts later revealed in other news stories, the maternal parents of the mother whose child it was were actually non-practising Muslims. ...

The five-year-old girl had dual nationality. She was then put into the care of the Muslim grandmother, who intended to take her back to the country of origin—to a completely different background from the one in which that child had been brought up. It turned out that the girl had a warm and appropriate relationship with those foster carers. Therefore, for all intents and purposes, they were ideal foster carers. Entirely because they happened to be Muslim and, on the face of it, she was a white Christian girl—who had never been to church and had more in common with Muslim heritage than Christian anyway—and because of a fabricated story about not allowing her to wear a cross, you deemed that she had been forced and it was not in the interests of that girl, which turned out not to be true, did it not?

Q616 Peter Wright: Well, the original story was correct on the basis of the facts known at the time. ...

Q644 Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op): I want to come on to some other issues. It is pretty well accepted that *The Sun*, the *Mail* and the *Express* have a history of what I would consider to be homophobic headlines and commentary over many years, going back decades. ...

Q645 Stephen Doughty: ... The one particularly egregious example ... was the decisions about the judges on the Brexit court case, where quite fairly the paper described one of the judges as having founded a European law group and the other one having charged taxpayers for advice, but you described the third as “an openly gay ex-Olympic fencer”. Can you explain to me what on earth any of those things and the sexuality of those individuals involved have to do with any of those stories? ...

Q646 Stephen Doughty: What does somebody’s sexuality have to do with their judgments in a major court?

Q647 Peter Wright: If you Google the particular judge involved, Sir Terence Etherton—he had become Master of the Rolls I think about six months previously—the first story that comes up is *The Guardian* report on his appointment, the headline is “Britain’s first openly gay judge becomes master of the rolls”.

Q648 Stephen Doughty: ... The appointment of somebody ... particularly of the first gay person to hold that role, is one thing. Relating it to the first part of your headline here, which is “The judges who blocked Brexit”, you are relating two—in the first case, the first two—facts which are materially relevant to their position on this, but in the third all you are talking about is their sexuality. ...

Q653 Stephen Doughty: ... You seem to think this is all very funny, Mr Wright, but there is a serious edge to this. Stonewall said last year that nearly half of all transgender schoolchildren have attempted suicide. On what we are talking about here, hate crime, the current figure is that 41% of all transgender people have suffered hate crime just in the last year. ...

When we see the suicide and hate crime figures, do you accept any responsibility whatsoever for generating the type of atmosphere that transgender people face in this country?

Paul Clarkson: ... We have an excellent relationship with a number of transgender lobby

groups that we have been engaging with over a number of years. ...

Q667 Sarah Jones (Labour): We have talked a lot about specific cases. I want to talk about the cumulative impact over a long period of time. The Chair has already mentioned that, at the moment, only 4% of content about Muslims is positive, and that for every one moderate Muslim mentioned, there were 21 examples of extremist Muslims. That is from Baroness Warsi's research.

Another example is when you look at the coverage of Brexit and the referendum. A King's College London report said that of the 99 front-page leads about immigration, 88 presented a negative picture and no front-page lead about migration presented a positive picture. Only 5% of the national population are Muslim—it is quite a small number—and yet a YouGov poll found that more than half of Britons surveyed regard Muslims as a threat to the UK. A lot of people who do not know any Muslims regard them as a threat. Do you think the negative coverage, whatever the rights and wrongs of each individual story, has a cumulative impact on people's opinions of Muslims? ...

Peter Wright: ... there is no anti-Muslim agenda; it doesn't exist.

Q669 Peter Wright: If we were trying to incite racial hatred it would be appearing on our front page. ... Stories inciting hatred against Muslims do not appear on our front page. ...

Q672 Chair: Hate crime in Britain is on the rise, particularly Islamophobia and hate crime against Muslims, and you think it is all okay—business as usual—and there is no need to do anything?

Peter Wright: No. I am afraid I think social media is frankly dreadful.

Q673 Chair: So it is all social media's fault and not the print media's? ...

Q675 Sarah Jones: ... What I am making a point about is the proportion of journalists who are Muslim, for example, which is 0.5%, compared with 5% of the population. Sometimes, there is unconscious bias that builds up over time. ...

Peter Wright: We have plenty of Muslim readers. I am sure that there are plenty of Muslims with right-wing views. ...

Q700 Kirstene Hair: ... Do you think that the current regulations in place for broadcast and print media are sufficient for these new platforms or do you think that we need an entirely different set of rules for social media platforms? ...

Q701 Paul Clarkson: We must give people a power to offend and the freedom to offend as long as there are other restraints about accuracy and so on. ...

Q702 Peter Wright: ... if one of our journalists goes on to Twitter or puts something on Facebook as a *Daily Mail* journalist, then that is regulated by IPSO. If somebody not employed by a newspaper puts stuff on social media, they are not regulated by anybody. I think that is something that the internet and social media industry is going to have to grapple with ...

Q704 Kirstene Hair: ... do you think that having stricter rules on removing hate speech would be a more effective method of regulation than making the specific social media companies responsible for all posts that appear on their platforms? ...

Q706 Chair: ... It is currently illegal to incite racial hatred. Would you accept having the words of the law in your editors' code?

Paul Clarkson: I believe that the law is the best form for dealing with incitement to hatred. I think there is certainly an argument—and I know IMPRESS's code and so on have a clause there—but I think we should leave it to the professionals: the CPS and the police.

Q707 Chair: You really would rather have the police and the prosecutors deciding what should happen in the newsroom than you yourselves through an editors' panel or through IPSO?

Paul Clarkson: I believe that there is the IPSO code and there's the law. We actually operate within both. I would be uncomfortable with IPSO deciding on what is hate speech and what is incitement to hatred. As talented and esteemed as they are, they do not know better than the CPS and the police. Of course, the code is constantly evolving and

it will be really interesting to find the Committee's opinions.

Q708 Chair: So you would prefer to have the law step into the newsroom than have self-regulation on this?

Paul Clarkson: It already does and there has been no journalist, I believe, who has ever been charged or arrested over incitement to hatred. ...

Q717 Ian Brunskill (Assistant Editor, The Times): ... Islamophobia in society—yes, definitely. I think none of us would dispute that. ... I must say I don't recognise the picture of intentional, deliberate Islamophobia in the press that has been presented ... The basis for Baroness Warsi's figure strikes me as a bit peculiar. I'm not quite sure where the 4% comes from. ...

Ian MacGregor (Editor Emeritus, Telegraph Media Group, and President, Society of Editors): ... The scale of Islamophobia in this country is appalling. When you read the figures that you rightly highlighted—1,200 people have been convicted under the Communications Act for hate speech—and combine that with the fact that the Home Office has reported recently that the police in England and Wales recorded over 80,000 hate crimes in 2016-17, and with what we hear from Labour MPs about the appalling things going on in social media and the horrible crimes and threats, it is appalling.

Q720 Ted Young (Editor, Metro): Particularly last year, with those horrific attacks, I think it is very important to sit and say to people, like with the page about the imams, that these are not Muslims—these are Islamist nutcases. ...

Q721 Ian MacGregor: ... Are we aware of the power of words and words that are chosen carefully? Absolutely. ...

Q722 Ian MacGregor: ... When it comes to unconscious bias, if I may address that in particular, we are very aware of that. For example, we are setting up workshops for the staff to look at diversity and inclusion ...

Ian Brunskill: ... We haven't got a mechanism that records how many Muslim stories we have done, but we would know at any given point what kind of signals we might have sent out on any of these topics, not least because readers will tell us ...

Q726 Stephen Doughty: ... do you think a headline like "Children sacrificed to appease trans lobby" is acceptable?

Ian Brunskill: ... the language there strikes me as slightly emotive. ...

Q730 Stephen Doughty: Do you think the use of the phrase "trans lobby" is an appropriate one?

Ian Brunskill: I don't have any objection to that. There is a lobby, or rather there are several transgender lobbies.

Q731 Stephen Doughty: So trans lobby is okay, but gay lobby, Jewish lobby?

Ian Brunskill: If there were one. ...

Q732 Stephen Doughty: I think it is very, very dangerous territory. ...

Q738 Sarah Jones: ... Mr Brunskill, in your written evidence you said to us: "It would be regrettable if continuing debate on these complex and important subjects were to be closed down on the basis of assertion and prejudice from vested interest groups who dislike the British press and appear to hold its readers in contempt." ...

When we have terrorist incidents reported—and this issue of whether people are called a jobless lone wolf or whether people are called a terrorist—you can look at each one and think "Well, they are true," but it is the unconscious bias that veers you in one direction more than another, and I think *The Times* in particular in the UK is such an important publication historically, to say that you have no mechanisms for looking at just how are we covering stories about Muslims is quite surprising. ...

Ian Brunskill: We don't have a mechanism for ticking boxes and going through the paper each morning and counting the number of Muslim stories. We have, as I have tried to say, an editorial setup which involves, one would hope, constant awareness of what we are doing, which draws on what we have done before. ...

Q741 Ian Brunskill: ... What we do is write about things that we don't know about—that we are not. We are not experts. We write about science; we are not scientists. We write about Muslims; we are not Muslims. We write all kinds of things. What you do is you find out the facts and you get them right, and you find out where to go to get the unbiased information.

Being alert to unconscious bias I think is something that is very much built in. ...

Q746 Ted Young: ... As far as young journalists are concerned, it is a real problem getting kids from minority backgrounds into journalism. We have one young guy from the Stephen Lawrence scheme who is currently on *Metro*, but there is just not enough diversity in our newsrooms at the moment. ...

Q747 Ian MacGregor: ...I am lucky enough to be at a newspaper that believes in having correspondents for certain areas. We certainly have a religious affairs correspondent. It is their duty to ensure they are on top of all these areas and understand all the different religious groups that exist. They are familiar with and in contact with them. ...

Q763 Naz Shah (Labour): Mr Brunskill, bringing it back to anti-Muslim hatred, you just suggested that you are not creating or doing anything that is Islamophobic or in that atmosphere. However, in January 2018, following your article, “St Stephen's in Newham bans hijabs for girls under 8”, deputy head Adam Bennett said: “They took a lot of footage, they chopped it up, they used it how they wanted, they had their agenda and they put stuff forward to create this big debate and unfortunately our school was left in the middle of this debate”.

Ian Brunskill: ... That wasn't a *Times* story. *The Times* reported on that story, but that wasn't us. That was *The Sunday Times*. ...

Q765 Naz Shah: ... unfortunately, when you have headlines that are grandstanding and are on your front pages, they offend. In comparison, your apologies don't. The offence caused is of a magnitude much higher than in your apology, which is very late coming. I argue that newspapers actually have a responsibility—yourself included—and you have failed in that. ...

Q779 John Woodcock (Labour Co-op): Mr MacGregor, you have talked at length about the newspapers' ethics and standards, and about combating and not propagating hate. Do you accept that, on reflection, your front page from 8 February—“the man who ‘broke the Bank of England’, backing secret plot to thwart Brexit”—fell short of those standards by using a classic anti-Semitic trope to describe a Jewish banker?

Ian MacGregor: No. We put out a statement at the time, and we stand by it. The *Telegraph* has a proud history of fighting against anti-Semitism. ...

Q780 Ian MacGregor: Just to answer your question, we actually said, and we stand by the fact, that we believe that any allegation or suggestion of that type is unfounded, and that the quote used was offensive. ...

Q782 John Woodcock: ... I am not doubting your sincerity in the newspapers overall, but a secret plot is a classic anti-Semitic trope and you used it with, as you describe, “a reclusive banker, George Soros, who just happens to be Jewish”—except he doesn't just happen to be Jewish, does he?

Ian MacGregor: We reject that and we haven't had that complaint. ...

Q789 Ian MacGregor: We stand by that story. ...

Q790 Ian MacGregor: ... We are open, in my view, to looking at all new ideas to improve things. However, it is important that we do not inhibit free speech and, secondly, that anything we might consider is workable and can be useful in practice. ...

Q791 Chair: ... The Public Order Act both supports and protects the freedom to offend and freedom of expression but also has this challenge in terms of preventing incitement to racial hatred. The Director of Public Prosecutions said that that is a balance that they have to consider when they look at individual cases in the law. I would much rather that, as a routine issue when it is about the newsroom, those issues are considered first and foremost by journalists or by a self-regulatory process than that the first point of call to

make the adjudication on that balance is the law or the CPS, which frankly do not have to look at those issues in the way that you do every single day. That is my question to you—why you would not welcome that being in the code.

Ian Brunskill: Maybe you need to look at doing something different with the code, so it can do what you are talking about. Incitement to hatred is a serious criminal offence. Although the code replicates the law here and there, it does not actually contain anything that directly replicates a serious criminal offence in that way. If you are going to be charged with it, it will be as a result of a proper police investigation. It will be a decision by the CPS and you will have a trial and a jury. The IPSO process ... does not start with the presumption of innocence. You get an IPSO complaint and you act on it. ...

Q793 Ian Murray (Executive Director, Society of Editors): ... I believe that there is a problem with Islamophobia in this country. It would be crass of me to say that the media as a whole does not play its part in that. Do I believe that that is a result of unconscious bias errors? I would say that that is what I believe, because I do not believe that there is a conscious effort anywhere in the media that I can see, including the national printed press, to set out with an anti-Muslim agenda. ...

Q794 Neil Benson (Chair, Editors Code Committee): As others have said, there is a law on incitement to hatred. The bar is set quite high. The editors' code, while it sometimes occupies similar territory to the law, specifically tries not to just copy what the law says. Where it has some overlaps, the code tries to then supplement the law and to add to it, to give journalists clear guidance on how to do their job and to maintain standards.

As has already been said, if the bar for incitement to hatred within the code was set lower than it is within the law, there is a danger of double jeopardy. The legal advice to editors, if they were facing a complaint under the IPSO code, would be to say nothing and not co-operate, because the odds are that there would be some sort of follow-up by the police. That is a situation that I don't think any of us want to get into. ...

Q796 Chair: But even in areas where you have a higher standard, there are still issues that are also potentially criminal as well. Again, there are standard procedures that the CPS operates with other regulatory bodies. If a criminal investigation is under way, the regulatory body steps back or waits until the criminal investigation is completed and so on. I just don't understand why that seems to be possible for other organisations, and for other bits of the code, but somehow is impossible on this issue.

Neil Benson: ... the difference is the danger of double jeopardy facing the editor. ...

Q797 Ian Murray: ... From the society's point of view, our concern is over protecting freedom of expression and protecting the free press. As a past member of the Code Committee, I know that these issues are considered extremely seriously and gone over, and past issues have come back and the code has evolved. ...

I understand that when we have some of the headlines that have been shown today, or others that have gone on, there is a knee-jerk reaction to say, "We need to tighten the rules, and clamp down." That is completely understandable, and in some cases it turns out that that is the case. All we would say is, "Can we please have the reasoned debate and discussion about this before we set things into law and into the code about journalists?" ...

Q798 Chair: Obviously, you operate within the law, and the legal framework currently has in it both protection for freedom of expression and the protection, effectively, for freedom to offend around religion. It also has protection against incitement to racial hatred, and both of those are in the Public Order Act. Do you think that the law has the right balance on protecting both ...?

Ian Murray: ... I think that the law has the right balance, in the sense that we are now trying to square the circle. We are trying to say that, on the one hand, we have a liberal society that allows freedom of expression, but on the other hand, we need to protect groups and individuals from that freedom of expression going too far. ...

Q800 Neil Benson: It is important to say that all newspapers are entitled to their view. That may be offensive or it may be biased at times, but in the end, it is quite difficult to envisage a scenario where there are ratios for what is right to publish and what is not. That is a very dangerous territory. I accept that an unremitting diet like that is bound to reinforce, at least, certain prejudices. ...

Q801 Neil Benson: This is tricky ground. Why should I, as a former editor, have a view about what another editor is producing if it is within the law and the general bounds of decency? ...

Q817 Naz Shah: Ian, I understand you were at the 10th annual Muslim awards last night.

Ian Murray: I was.

Q818 Naz Shah: ... It is in its 10th year. Much was being celebrated across the Muslim community, from arts, medicine and everything else. Yet, despite it being in its 10th year—again, this is according to Baroness Warsi's evidence—a study of 200,000 newspaper articles making reference to Muslims identified heroes 39 times, brave Muslims on 20 occasions and honest Muslims in six out of 20,000. Kind Muslims were not found anywhere in the investigation. 99.965% of the time, the references were negative. Do you not think the research supports my assertion that there is a culture of Islamophobic headlines and stories pursued by newspapers?

Ian Murray: I don't think it is a conscious one. I seriously don't think there is a conscious culture there. ... I have been in contact with the national newspapers, national reporters and national broadcasters, and there is no conscious Islamophobia there. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/oral/81930.html>

TOP

Israel

House of Lords Oral Answers

Gaza

Lord Hylton (Crossbench): To ask Her Majesty's Government what proposals they have for processes by which Israel might be held accountable for its treatment of the inhabitants of Gaza.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the recent violence in Gaza. Israel has the right to protect its borders, and Palestinians have the right to protest. There is a need to establish the facts, including why such a volume of live fire has been used and what role Hamas has played. All sides must now commit to restraint and peaceful protest. The UK remains committed to a two-state solution which ends the conflict.

Lord Hylton: My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness for her reply, which deals more with the present situation. I am concerned with the background. Do the Government agree with United States Senator Bernie Sanders, who is Jewish, and who said last week: "Hamas's ... violence ... cannot excuse trapping ... two million people inside Gaza"? He added that the United States, "must play a ... role in ending the Gaza blockade". If Israel will not change its policy, how can it be held accountable for breaches of international law—for example, collective punishments? Will the Government consult the United Nations General Assembly about a possible tribunal?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: As I said, the Government remain gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and continue to monitor it closely, including the effect that electricity shortages are having on the health sector. We are supportive of the Palestinian Authority resuming government functions in

Gaza, helping to improve the dire humanitarian and economic situation. We continue to call on the Israeli Government to ease restrictions, and for Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt to work together to ensure a durable solution for Gaza. We share the commitment of the United States to improving the situation in Gaza and bringing forward a viable peace plan. We remain committed to a two-state solution which ends the conflict and alleviates the suffering of the Gazan people.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, I do not know whether the Minister has had the opportunity to read the leader in yesterday's *Guardian*, which summed up the situation extremely well. For the two-state solution to be viable, we have to articulate very strongly why it is important. If people in Israel think that by destroying and harming the Arab cause in the way that they are doing now will help with peace and the long-term security of Israel, they are mistaken. We need to make the case for a two-state solution strongly, and we need to argue it very strongly with the current Government in Israel. If they continue with their current policy, they will undermine the cause of peace but also ensure that the Arabs will stand up and fight back strongly.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: The noble Lord paints a true picture of the situation and of the angst and frustration at the fact that we seem unable to bring about a two-state solution; the angst of that is palpable. I have not read the leader in the *Guardian*, but I will make sure the officials get me a copy and I will make sure that I read it. People are continually trying to make the case that the actual motivation and desire to achieve peace in a two-state solution must come from the individuals involved, in Israel and Palestine, and we will do everything we can to help that happen.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat): Does the noble Baroness think it acceptable that Israel is not allowing out for treatment those who have been wounded in the recent protests to which she referred? Have the Government made any assessment of whether the sniper rifles and components given export licences and sold to Israel by UK firms have been used on protestors?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Of course, such behaviour is unacceptable. The information I have is that we take our responsibilities for the export of defence arms extremely seriously. We approve only equipment that is for Israel's legitimate self-defence, and all applications for export licences are assessed on a case-by-case basis against strict criteria. We will not issue a licence if there is a clear risk that the equipment might be used for internal repression.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench): My Lords, in her answer, the Minister referred to the Government welcoming the United States' support for the people of Gaza. Can she tell us what that consisted of? I seem to have missed it. Perhaps she can say what support the United States is now giving to the people of Gaza. Once again, can she explain why the Government rejected the view of the International Relations Committee of this House that the best way we could show our support for a two-state solution is by recognising the state of Palestine?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: On the support that the United States is giving to Gaza, I will need to write to the noble Lord about the detail of that. On the two-state solution, given the lack of experience on my part in Foreign Office matters, all I will say is that everything I have learnt about this confirms that it is indeed a two-state solution that we look to. It is complicated and difficult, but I remind noble Lords of the debate we had on Syria where the noble Lord, Lord Roberts of Llandudno, spoke. Of course, one likes to think that the situation in Syria can be resolved, but it looks hopeless. Quoting Nelson Mandela, the noble Lord said—I paraphrase—that everything looks impossible until it happens. We must hope that we can get the peace that we need in these two states.

The Lord Bishop of Norwich: My Lords, can the Minister say whether the Government support the UN Secretary-General's call for an independent investigation into the recent bloodshed in Gaza?

Baroness Stedman-Scott: I can confirm that there is an urgent need to establish the facts. The UK is supportive of accountability and transparency, and we welcome Israel's commitment to investigate the conduct of operations. We urge for those findings to be made public and, where wrongdoing is found, for those responsible to be held to account.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-04-24/debates/81BAB3A0-8A43-4033-869E-7834975CB11F/Gaza>

Scottish Parliament Point of Order

John Finnie (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would like to raise a point of order in relation to rule 3.1 of standing orders, which is the rule that outlines the duties of the Presiding Officer and the Deputy Presiding Officers. Subparagraph 1(d) of that rule says that the Presiding Officer shall "represent the Parliament in discussions and exchanges with any parliamentary, governmental, administrative or other body, whether within or outwith the United Kingdom."

Presiding Officer, particularly with regard to recent events in Gaza, which have involved considerable loss of life, I would be interested to know whether you took the opportunity to raise the issue of justice for Palestine when you met the Israeli ambassador today.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I thank Mr Finnie for giving me advance notice of his point of order. As he and, I hope, other members will be aware, one of my duties as Presiding Officer is to welcome all ambassadors on behalf of the Scottish Parliament. It is the case that I do not divulge the nature or content of the courtesy calls that we have.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11481&i=104236#ScotParlOR>

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UK Parliament

** European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/europeanunionwithdrawal.html>

Supplementary Delegated Powers Memorandum

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2017-2019/0079/18079-supplementaryDPM3.pdf>

** Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

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

Scottish Parliament Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee
consideration of Legislative Consent Motion

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11476&i=104214#ScotParlOR>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

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Consultations

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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