

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Prime Minister's Questions

col 154 Q4. **Maggie Throup (Conservative):** Anti-semitism has no place in British public life. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that she will always work to ensure that this remains the case? [906684]

The Prime Minister: Jewish people living in this country should feel safe and secure, and should not have to worry about their future in their own country. There is no place for racial hatred in our society, and it is important that we take every step to tackle it. That is why we were the first country in the world to adopt the definition of antisemitism set out by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance; we have been taking steps to provide funding to ensure that security measures can be taken in Jewish faith schools and synagogues, and we have provided funding to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust to run events for Holocaust Memorial Day. We should all be united in our determination to tackle antisemitism, so when the leader of the Labour party stands up he should apologise for saying that Jewish people who have lived in this country their whole lives do not understand English irony.

Jeremy Corbyn (Labour): There is no place for racism in any form within our society—on that we are all agreed—and we should tackle it wherever it arises, in our parties as well, and that includes the Conservative party. ...

col 156 **The Prime Minister:** ... What is the right hon. Gentleman doing? He is trying to change his party so that antisemites can call the creation of Israel racist, and he should be ashamed of himself.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-09-05/debates/829C52B2-FB18-4604-A35A-3128A853B11C/Engagements#contribution-644A5BC5-B08F-4A40-81F4-24D185AC04EA>

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House of Commons Oral Answers

Topical Questions: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Richard Burden (Labour): ... May I put it to [the Secretary of State] that one of the most

disreputable aspects of President Trump's decision to end United States funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency is the fact that he dressed it up as part of a grand negotiating strategy towards what he calls the deal of the century, when in reality that decision is hitting schools and hospitals and the food aid for hundreds of thousands of people in abject poverty? I applaud the increase in funding for UNRWA, but may I press the Secretary of State a bit more about what action the UK Government and their partners will take to ensure that the vital lifeline that UNRWA provides to vulnerable people around the world will not be lost?

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Jeremy Hunt): As my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East said earlier, we do not agree with the American Administration's decision on this issue. Today's funding announcement is part of our response, but I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we will talk to other donors as well, to see whether we can make up the gap in funding to UNRWA that has been caused by that decision.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-09-04/debates/4E3D7BB9-AF92-48AB-B534-DA8896B3923C/TopicalQuestions#contribution-0E4C2FC2-21A2-4515-ADF5-649A790C08EF>

Topical Questions: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Joan Ryan (Labour): It is very welcome that the UK is the first country to support the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace to bring people together to build peace, reconciliation and coexistence—vital for a lasting settlement. What multilateral and bilateral steps will the Government now be taking to build international support for that vital fund?

Alistair Burt: The right hon. Lady is right that one of the elements of distress over the years has been the gradual separation of young people, in particular, in the Palestinian areas and those in Israel. All efforts to use the organisations that bring people together are to be supported and sponsored. She will know well that we have a bilateral programme to do this. I hope to ensure when I am in conversation with others, particularly at the UN General Assembly, that this area is not neglected and that we see more of it. It also forms part of the comprehensive settlement we know is necessary to end the conflict in the area.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-09-04/debates/4E3D7BB9-AF92-48AB-B534-DA8896B3923C/TopicalQuestions#contribution-49024A9A-7428-4B7E-AD80-A006379C9107>

Peace Process: Israel and Palestine

15. **Alex Cunningham (Labour):** What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the peace process in Israel and Palestine. [906722]

19. **Theresa Villiers (Conservative):** What assessment he has made of the effect of recent rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. [906726]

20. **Matthew Pennycook (Labour):** What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the peace process in Israel and Palestine. [906727]

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): There is an urgent need to restart the peace process, and we regularly press Israel and the Palestinians to resume direct negotiations towards a two-state solution. We are in close consultation with international partners on how to encourage the parties to the middle east peace process to reverse the negative trends on the ground. Rocket fire and other violence makes achieving peace more difficult.

Alex Cunningham: I am grateful for that answer. The World Health Organisation reports that 10 Palestinian people, including a pregnant woman and her two children, were killed and more than 400 were injured by Israeli forces in one week in August. Instead of deploying even more chatter, why will the international community not actually act and protect some of the most vulnerable people on earth?

Alistair Burt: The experiences in Gaza and the crisis we have seen over the summer have different roots and causes. It is essential that all those who are contributing in any way to the violence in relation to the process desist and find a

way through to the peace opportunities that are there. We deeply regret the loss of life, and it is essential that all sides respond to that. Also, the violence that comes from Gaza towards Israel is making negotiations very difficult.

Theresa Villiers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that recent rocket attacks by Hamas demonstrate, once again, that they are the biggest roadblock to peace in the middle east, frustrating the sincere efforts made by Israel to try to secure a peaceful future for the region?

Alistair Burt: Both the rocket fire and the incendiary devices that have come from Gaza have certainly made this difficult for Israeli politics, because a great deal of damage has been done in the area, which encourages people to demand that their Government protect them and keep them safe. As we know well, there are difficulties on all sides. Our concern has been that the problems in Gaza have made it more difficult for the negotiations, which we all anticipate following the US envoy's reports, to get started. That is why we urge a restraint on violence and that the talking going on all through the region bears some fruit.

Matthew Pennycook: In response to the cruel decision taken by the Trump Administration to cut US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the German Government have pledged to increase their financial support for the agency. Will the Minister commit his Government to do the same, so that Palestinian refugees do not suffer as a result of the President's decision?

Alistair Burt: I am pleased to announce to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that today we have taken the decision to increase funding to UNRWA by a further £7 million. I spoke just a couple of hours ago to Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl to express our support for UNRWA. We understand the concerns of the United States, but we do not believe that the way it has gone about this is correct. We will continue to support the most vulnerable people, because that also forms a vital part of a just solution to the issues between the Palestinians and Israel.

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the single most important thing for both unlocking the peace process and bringing relief to the desperate lives of Palestinians in Gaza is for Hamas to renounce violence and terror, and turn its back on those ways?

Alistair Burt: Yes. Hamas's resistance to meeting the Quartet principles and to renouncing violence, by contrast to the Palestinian Authority, who have done that for many years, is indeed a stumbling block. Talks, brokered by Egypt, are taking place in the region, as we are well aware. Who knows what will come out of those talks, but if there is to be any progress in the future, Hamas's position on Israel has to change.

Nigel Dodds (DUP): To follow up on that point, there needs to be the renunciation of not only violence, but of the idea of the annihilation of Israel as a state. If we are to have proper negotiations, is it not critical that they are based on a mutual recognition of people's rights and not on the basis of Hamas and others wanting to see the destruction of Israel?

Alistair Burt: Of course, the right hon. Gentleman is right; Israel cannot be expected to find an accommodation with terrorist groups that seek an annihilation and the extinction of the country. However, there are opportunities to make progress on that. Hamas's position is in contrast with that of the Palestinian Authority, who have accepted the existence of Israel and worked with it on security matters in the past 20 years. A resolution has to be just to all sides in the situation, but Hamas's position cannot hold.

Helen Goodman (Labour): I welcome what the Minister has just said about new funding for UNRWA. Labour has been saying for months that proposed cuts from Donald Trump would damage Palestinian schooling and education and harm the peace process. Will the Foreign Office also now take the lead in organising an international emergency conference, so that others may also pledge more support?

Alistair Burt: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's support, and it is a common view in the House. We have increased funding more than once during this year, and more than £40 million extra has been brought forward to support UNRWA. I spoke to the commissioner-general about education in particular. He has the funds to open the schools at present and keep them going, but this will depend on further funding decisions in the future. I hope that we will be able to take part in mutual discussions at the UN General Assembly with other states that are affected. This is not just about the west bank and Gaza; it is also about Jordan and Lebanon. It is about places where children are getting an education. We are talking about an education that is gender neutral in a way in which other parts of the education system in the region are not. The question is: if UNRWA does not provide the education, who might? That is why it is so important to keep this going.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-09-04/debates/258E8F7F-44F8-4482-A037-D73741157E25/PeaceProcessIsraelAndPalestine>

United Nations

Two-State Solution Key for Security, Stability in Middle East, Secretary-General Tells United Nations International Media Seminar

Following is UN Secretary-General António Guterres' message, delivered by Alison Smale, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, to the 2018 United Nations International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East ...

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains central to the Middle East quagmire. The recent tensions in Gaza are a painful reminder of how fragile the situation is. The people of the region and the world cannot afford another escalation of violence. The United Nations remains strongly committed to a just, comprehensive and lasting two-State solution that ends the 50-year occupation and resolves all final status issues. This is key for security and stability in the entire region. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sgsm19193.doc.htm>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

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>

Scottish Parliament

Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108681.aspx>

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** new or updated today

**** closes in 8 days**

20 years of the Human Rights Act (closing date 14 September 2018)

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/human-rights-committee/news-parliament-2017/20-years-human-rights-act-launch-17-19/>

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