

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Westminster Hall Debate

Freedom of Speech: Universities

col 222WH Harriet Harman (Labour): ... The right to free speech is of course a foundation for democracy. It is important in all settings, but especially in universities, where education and learning are advanced through dialogue and debate. It underpins academic freedom. ...

col 223WH I think it is true to say that when the Joint Committee went into this inquiry, having heard the Minister say that there was a problem, we went in with open minds. ... I was quite sceptical about whether there really was a problem. But it is also true to say that at the end of all the evidence—we heard evidence from university administrators, student unions, student societies, particularly Jewish societies and Islamic societies, campaigners such as Peter Tatchell, trans rights protagonists and, indeed, Members of the House of Commons—we were all convinced that there was a problem ...

col 224WH We were concerned about the guidance issued by the Government in relation to the Prevent duty deterring some students, particularly Muslims, from inviting or questioning speakers they wanted to hear. ...

col 225WH No speaker has the right to speak in a university, but students have a right to hear who they want to hear irrespective of whether others might find it offensive or insulting. There is a place for meetings of, say, people who have been victims of sexual assault or those of a particular religion, but we cannot have the whole campus being a safe space with the lowest common denominator. ...

col 226WH Fiona Bruce (Conservative): ... Free speech is not an absolute right. There are limitations on it to ensure that it is not exercised in a way that causes harm to others by, for example, inciting murder, violence or terrorism or stirring up racial hatred or hatred for other groups, or if it is defamatory or malicious or constitutes harassment. We found that within university settings the inhibitions and restrictions on free speech went much further than that. ...

col 229WH Our Committee concluded that the concept of safe spaces, having been extended to entire university campuses, is unhelpful. It is not only unhelpful. If minority views are suppressed across the whole campus, but they are not views that are promoting terrorism or inciting the kind of activity I referred to earlier, the concept is actually against the law, impinging on the right to free speech under article 10 of the European convention on human rights. A number of students unions tried to argue in evidence to us that it was necessary to limit speakers who cause harm through speech—harm caused because people might find speech disturbing or upsetting. As our report says,

however, this is counter or detrimental to free speech. ...

col 230WH Hate speech results from the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words, or the displaying of written material that is threatening, abusive or insulting and therefore intended to cause the person harassment, alarm or distress, or to stir up racial hatred. Although that is the definition of hate speech, and, as we were told in evidence, “it is meant to be used narrowly in relation to any speech that fulfils the particulars under the Public Order Act 1986...over time, the phrase has become embedded into everyday language to describe any statement that some may find ‘offensive’.” ...

col 231WH At universities, there is an increasing tendency to conflate offensive speech with hate speech, which “has resulted in a far greater willingness to countenance censorship.” ...

col 232WH It is clear that since our report more instances have come to light. For example, a colleague on the Committee received an email from UK Lawyers for Israel this week that expressed a number of concerns about specific policies on university campuses, including ticketing requirements and restrictions on advertising. It says that, although our report mentions that some pro-Israel events were disrupted, that happens on many occasions. The impact of such disruptions can be not only burdensome regulations and requirements for future events; the cost, time and administrative burden, and the need to protect people from hostile protests leaves students who run such societies exhausted and put off from hosting events. In an echo of another of our comments, UK Lawyers for Israel said that universities must impose penalties on students who incite, encourage or participate in the disruption of meetings. ...

col 233WH **Alex Burghart (Conservative):** ... It is obviously the case that protest itself is a form of freedom of speech, right up to the point where it inhibits somebody else’s right to express themselves. ...

Much the same is true with no-platforming. We were told that there were actually very few registered cases of individuals being no-platformed. However, once a policy of no-platforming on a particular issue is established, it means that there will not even be a discussion as to whether people should discuss that issue, because if they do not conform to the strictures laid down by the university or the student body they will not even have a chance to be no-platformed, because they will not even be considered as potential speakers. ...

col 235WH **Deidre Brock (SNP):** ... I am pleased that universities in Scotland seem to be maintaining those freedoms rather well, and that the Scottish approach to regulation appears to be more effective than the rather heavily laden approach being taken in England. ...

Freedom of speech is not an indivisible right. ... There is no free speech without stout defence of it and without rational and reasonable care taken of the privilege. There is no free speech where we allow hate speech. Those repressed by the violence of hatred are not free to speak. Those cowed by hate speech aimed at others are not free to speak. Those practising hate speech are not speaking; they are shouting so loudly that they are excluding other voices. Hate speech is the enemy of free speech, and we should not allow it. That does not mean, however ... that we should ban speakers we do not like or intimidate their supporters. ...

col 240WH **The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and innovation (Sam Gyimah):** ... We live in an open society and open debate is particularly important. If our democracy is to flourish, someone having views that are offensive to someone else is not sufficient reason to prevent them expressing those views—but expressing them does not mean that they should go unchallenged. ...

col 242WH My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) touched on the risk of a political monoculture developing on our campuses, so that, by default, certain ideas are seen as unacceptable. If free speech is to work, the same standards should be applied to all ideas, rather than believing that certain ideas should not be held because they are unpopular or unfashionable. ...

I also think that protest has a place. We want active debate, but we also want active and peaceful protest. However, protest becomes unacceptable when it is a deliberate attempt to prevent an event from taking place because the protestors disagree with the ideas that will be aired there. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-05-17/debates/973CF837-FFDF-47AF-89AB-D044A17826F9/FreedomOfSpeechUniversities>

The Joint Committee on Human Rights report referred to above, "Freedom of Speech in Universities", can be read at

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201719/jtselect/jtrights/589/589.pdf>

House of Commons Oral Answer

Topical Questions: Women and Equalities

T3. Colin Clark (Conservative): What measures is the Minister taking to tackle the rise of anti-Semitism? [905395]

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; it is an extremely important and pertinent one. The number of anti-Semitic incidents in the UK is both unacceptable and, frankly, frightening for anyone of a Jewish background or disposition. We should all do what we can to tackle it. Our relationship with the Jewish community has been built on the solid work of the cross-Government working group on tackling anti-Semitism, which ensures that any issues are brought forward quickly and are dealt with. The Government are providing more than £13.4 million to ensure the security of Jewish faith schools, synagogues and communal buildings, following the concerns raised by the Jewish community. I wish that we did not have to spend that money, but we do, and we are.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-05-17/debates/5D0C3DE3-E9CC-4407-BDD0-DAB92E2A1555/TopicalQuestions#contribution-C3FE6ED4-FC5B-4E0A-ACDE-6739B1D03145>

House of Lords Written Answers

Racially Aggravated Offences: Sentencing

Philip Davies (Conservative) [142385] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the ethnicity was of each (a) offender and (b) victim of each racially aggravated offence which resulted in a prison sentence in the last five years; and what the average sentence was by ethnicity for each such offence.

Rory Stewart: It is not possible to identify from centrally held data the ethnicity of each victim of racially aggravated offences resulting in a prison sentence without incurring disproportionate cost.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-09/142385/>

Islam

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (UKIP) [HL7530] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the answer by Baroness Williams of Trafford on 30 April (HL Deb, col 1845), what elements of the Lord Bishop of Leeds' question gave the Minister cause to say that "the right reverend Prelate is right".

Baroness Williams of Trafford: The Lord Bishop of Leeds was right in that it is wrong to bear false witness against your neighbour. In Parliament, it would be against the Ministerial code to do so.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-02/HL7530/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-04-30/debates/3CD7BEEC-E4BF-41CC-8880-D5A43D4D3459/MuslimsPopulationGrowthAndShariaLaw#contribution-6D93C31C-6F42-4CA9-B5F7-7ED23CD5D4F9>

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Israel

House of Commons Oral Answers

Topical Questions: International Trade

Alex Cunningham (Labour): In the light of the latest mass killing of Palestinian civilians by the Israel Defence Forces, will the Secretary of State review and apply the criteria for arms sales to states that violate international law?

The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Liam Fox): The UK has one of the most robust arms export systems, which we operate under the consolidated criteria in line with our EU partners.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-05-17/debates/5E23DD11-E10D-4CC4-B09E-BCFAC622108C/TopicalQuestions#contribution-62B2D335-62D1-4623-8055-541044F5E27F>

Topical Questions: International Trade

T3. Karen Lee (Labour): In 2017, Britain sold £216 million worth of military contracts and supplies to Israel and £571 million worth to Turkey. The disproportionate use of deadly force by those nations against Palestinian and Kurdish citizens has been rightly condemned. Does the Minister agree that the UK needs a transparent and human rights-oriented arms trade to ensure that this country does not enable brutal attacks to be made on civilians? [905370]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): All export licence applications are rigorously assessed, case by case, against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria. No licence will be granted if there is a clear risk that the equipment might be used for internal repression, or in a serious violation of international humanitarian law. However, we continue to monitor the situation in Israel and Gaza closely.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-05-17/debates/5E23DD11-E10D-4CC4-B09E-BCFAC622108C/TopicalQuestions#contribution-625045A7-E60D-423E-A553-47BBC4BCB059>

House of Commons Written Answers

UNRWA: Finance

Jim Cunningham (Labour) [143655] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will take steps to ensure that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has adequate funding for the 2018 annual Children's Summer Camp in Gaza.

Alistair Burt: We recognise the valuable role UNRWA plays in supporting young Palestinian refugees across the region. We are aware that as a result of funding pressure some of their programming, including the Children's Summer Camp, may be at risk. The UK will deliver its next round of financial support earlier than originally planned to help meet the immediate needs of Palestinian refugees, and remains unequivocally committed to supporting both UNRWA and the education of Palestinians.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-14/143655/>

Israel: Gaza

Caroline Lucas (Green) [143735] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether his Department has had discussions with its Israeli counterpart on the use by the Israeli military of expanding bullets in the Gaza Strip between February 2018 and May 2018; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt: Whilst we have not raised this specific issue, the use of live fire is deeply troubling and has led to significant loss of life. I raised concerns about the use of live ammunition against protestors in Gaza with my Israeli counterpart on 13 May. The Minister for Human Rights, also raised this issue with the Israeli government during his visit to Israel on 11 April. As I said in my statement of 14 May we continue to implore Israel to show greater restraint.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-14/143735/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Jerusalem and Gaza

Baroness Warsi (Conservative): To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the opening of the United States embassy in Jerusalem; and what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the ongoing loss of Palestinian lives in Gaza.

Baroness Goldie: My Lords, the United Kingdom believes that the decision to move the US embassy is unhelpful for prospects of peace. As my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary said, this is playing the wrong card at the wrong time. The UK has no plans to move the British embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv. The Foreign Secretary and Ministers for the Middle East and for human rights have raised concerns with the Israeli authorities about Gaza, urging restraint and a reduction in the use of live fire.

Baroness Warsi: I thank my noble friend for that Answer. Noble Lords will recall that four years ago I said that the Government's policy on Israel and Palestine was morally indefensible, unfair, unbalanced and inconsistent in its treatment of the Israelis and the Palestinians. I hope that my noble friend will prove that I was wrong by simply answering "yes" to the following two scenarios. Does she agree that we condemn those who do not recognise the state of Israel, deny its existence and threaten its security? Does she also agree that we should equally condemn those who do not recognise Palestine, deny its existence and threaten its viability with illegal settlement building?

Baroness Goldie: I will respond to my noble friend by taking her second question first. This issue frequently arises in this Chamber. The United Kingdom's position has been very clear. We will recognise a Palestinian state only when we judge that that recognition can best bring about peace. Recent events very tragically confirm the chaos of hostility. It is very clear that bilateral recognition in itself will not end the occupation or the problems that come with it without a negotiated settlement. Two parties can achieve that negotiated settlement: one is Israel, the other the Palestinian Authority. Without that negotiated settlement, sadly and tragically, these problems will continue.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, one of the things the Government acknowledged on Tuesday in response to the Urgent Question was the need for a full and independent investigation through the UN into the terrible tragedy in Gaza, which involved the shooting of unarmed innocent people. That needs investigation. At the time, the noble Lord the Minister undertook to give us a timetable for when we might see the fruits of all this hard work at the United Nations. Is the noble Baroness in a position to tell us now that we will go to the United Nations and demand a full and independent investigation into what I would call horrendous crimes?

Baroness Goldie: I reaffirm that the UK is appalled by the deaths and injuries suffered in Gaza. There is an urgent need to establish the facts of what happened. Our UN ambassador said at the UN Security Council emergency meeting on Tuesday that we want to reiterate our support for independent and transparent investigations into the events that took place in Gaza. We have to find out what happened, what took place and what events induced the conflict, and get to the heart of the facts. Only when we do that—and we can do it only with international co-operation—can we then determine how best to proceed.

Lord Pannick (Crossbench): Would the noble Baroness agree that there is no point calling for an international investigation and at the same time describing the events as a crime before that investigation has taken place? Would she also tell the House whether the Government have urged restraint not just on Israel but on Hamas?

Baroness Goldie: I can reassure the noble Lord that yesterday my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu. He encouraged them to call for calm and to work to de-escalate the situation. On the earlier point raised by the noble Lord, Lord Collins, an investigation is needed to establish the facts. Before we establish the facts, we do not know what has actually happened or what the appropriate consequences should be.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat): Can the Minister confirm that it remains the position of the British Government that the eastern part of Jerusalem taken by Israel in 1967 remains classified as occupied and that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies there? Does she agree that it is vital to be in lockstep with our EU partners in relation to the Middle East, given an unpredictable President who has pulled out of the nuclear agreement with Iran and set up the US embassy in Jerusalem?

Baroness Goldie: In responding to the Question from my noble friend Lady Warsi, I indicated the Government's position in relation to the US embassy. The UK regards east Jerusalem as part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): My Lords, I declare an interest as the chairman of the Jerusalem Foundation in the UK. The foundation has distributed more than \$1 billion for the benefit of all citizens of Jerusalem irrespective of their religion, including even the Via Dolorosa. I know Jerusalem well. There is some hypocrisy in criticising the move of the American embassy. The UK Government already have their consulate-general in east Jerusalem. Will my noble friend the Minister confirm that the UK Government have placed every other embassy in the world in the host country's city of choice? The Jerusalem municipality led by Mayor Barkat has ensured that there has been only peaceful coexistence for many years in Jerusalem. Does my noble friend agree that Monday's appalling loss of life in Gaza was in no small part due to Hamas enticing innocent civilians from peaceful protest to violence?

Baroness Goldie: My noble friend's illustration of the possibility for constructive and peaceful harmony in Jerusalem is encouraging. I applaud him and his foundation for what they are seeking to do. On the wider front of how we take matters forward, I go back to the point that there has to be a negotiated settlement. Where embassies are located has of course to be a decision for individual sovereign states—I have made clear the UK's position in relation to that. Let me make it clear that we recognise the right of the Palestinians to engage in peaceful protest. There is deep anxiety that that may have been hijacked by extremist elements, which is profoundly to be regretted. Equally, we recognise the right of Israel to act in self-defence if its security is threatened.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-05-17/debates/8C79FB79-8A1B-45E4-AE92-5C4849658746/JerusalemAndGaza>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israeli Settlements

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL7485] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel concerning Israel's Settlements Regularisation Law and the test case to be held before the Israeli Supreme Court on 3 June; and what assessment they have made of the letter from Lawyers for Human Rights to the Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As the UK made clear in our statement of 7 February 2017 we condemn the passing of the Land Regularisation Law by the Knesset. This damages Israel's standing with its international partners. This law paves the way for significant growth in settlements deep in the West Bank, threatening the viability of the two-state solution. I received the letter from Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR) outlining their concerns. I replied to the LPHR on this issue on 11 May.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-01/HL7485/>

West Bank: Water

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL7618] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they plan to discuss with the Palestinian Hydrology Group an equitable basis for sharing the available water in the West Bank.

Lord Bates: DFID works with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) to support up to 1 million Gazans by providing clean water and rehabilitating sanitation facilities. DFID is also developing a new economic development programme which will help to address the lack of safe water in the Occupied Palestinian Territories through a range of activities, including by: enhancing the domestic desalination capacity; increasing capacity to import more water; and reforms and institutional capacity building to Palestinian water agencies. There are no plans at present to discuss an equitable basis for sharing the available water in the West Bank with the Palestinian Hydrology Group.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-08/HL7618/>

United Nations

Middle East Conflict 'Purely Man-made', Prominent Activist-Scholar Stresses as United Nation Forum on Question of Palestine Begins

Seventy years after a General Assembly resolution first sought to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish States — an anniversary that sparked both joyous commemorations and lethal violence earlier this week — Palestinian and Israeli scholars, legal experts and Government officials today opened a high-level forum aimed at harnessing the region's difficult historical lessons and forging a new path forward towards peace. ...

"This is a purely man-made conflict," said Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian scholar and long-serving member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). In opening remarks, she described events that had led to the expulsion of Palestinians from their land 70 years ago this week, saying that the subsequent system of bias and power politics had enabled Israel to continue to strike at the rule of law, generating a culture of hate and oppression. ...

Warning that no nation could expect exceptionalism or impunity for its actions, she underlined that President Donald Trump of the United States had "smashed the negotiating table into splinters" by moving his country's Embassy to Jerusalem ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gapal1407.doc.htm>

Peace Requires Political Will, Courage from All Sides, Deputy Secretary-General Stresses in Remarks to United Nations Forum on Question of Palestine

... Today is an occasion to reflect on the costs and consequences of the 1948 war, which resulted in the mass displacement and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes. It is also an opportunity to look ahead at what must be done to address this situation. ...

The recent violence in Gaza underscores the need for action. Israeli forces must exercise maximum restraint in the use of force, in particular live fire. Hamas and the leaders of the demonstrations have a responsibility to prevent all violent actions. It is imperative that everyone show the utmost restraint to avoid further loss of life, including all civilians – and particularly children – are not in harm's way. The cycle of violence in Gaza must end, it serves no one. As I have since the start of the violence, I repeat my call for such killings to be investigated thoroughly.

These events remind us that for far too long the international community has failed to find a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees — as it has failed to find a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. To this day, the refugees of 1948 and their descendants — now numbering more than 5.3 million women, men and children — are unable to return to their homes. Instead, the lives of generations of Palestinians and Israelis have been defined and confined by a conflict that has shaped their physical and human landscape under a heavy atmosphere of fear, mutual distrust. ...

We, the international community, must work for an outcome where fear is replaced with dignity and denial cedes ground to justice. We must strive for a future where Israel and Palestine thrive as States in which all are equally respected, and where civil society is able to play its constructive role. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/dsgsm1175.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the deteriorating human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem: Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

Appalling recent events in Gaza have called this Council into Special Session. Since the protests began on 30 March, 87 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli security forces in the context of the demonstrations, including 12 children; 29 others, including three children, were killed in other circumstances. And over 12,000 people have been injured, more than 3,500 of them by live ammunition. ...

This was not "a PR victory for Hamas", in the reported words of a senior Israeli military spokesman; it was a tragedy for thousands of families. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has also described the demonstrators as being "paid by Hamas", and has said the Israeli security forces "try to minimize casualties". But there is little evidence of any attempt to minimize casualties on Monday. Although some of the demonstrators threw Molotov cocktails, used sling-shots to throw stones, flew burning kites into Israel, and attempted to use wire-cutters against the two fences between Gaza and Israel, these actions alone do not appear to constitute the imminent threat to life or deadly injury which could justify the use of lethal force.

The stark contrast in casualties on both sides is also suggestive of a wholly disproportionate response: on Monday, on the Israeli side, one soldier was reportedly wounded, slightly, by a stone. Killings resulting from the unlawful use of force by an occupying power may also constitute "wilful killings" – a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Palestinians have exactly the same human rights as Israelis do. They have the same

rights to live safely in their homes, in freedom, with adequate and essential services and opportunities. And of this essential core of entitlements due to every human being, they are systematically deprived. ...

Israel, as an occupying power under international law, is obligated to protect the population of Gaza and ensure their welfare. But they are, in essence, caged in a toxic slum from birth to death; deprived of dignity; dehumanised by the Israeli authorities to such a point it appears officials do not even consider that these men and women have a right, as well as every reason, to protest. ...

Those responsible for violations must in the end be held accountable. In this context, as in all conflicts where impunity is widespread, unless ended by a peace settlement, excessive violence – both horrifying and criminal – flows easily from the barrel of a gun; becomes normal, destroying the occupied perhaps, but something crucial too in the occupier. What do you become when you shoot to kill someone who is unarmed, and not an immediate threat to you? You are neither brave, nor a hero. You have become someone very different to that. ...

The occupation must end, so the people of Palestine can be liberated, and the people of Israel liberated from it. End the occupation, and the violence and insecurity will largely disappear.

I urge Israel to act in accordance with its international obligations. Palestinians' right to life, their right to security of the person and rights to freedom of assembly and expression must be respected and protected. All individuals' right to health must be respected and protected, regardless of the context in which they may have been injured. The rules of engagement for Israel's security forces must be in line with Israel's international obligations, and I urge that they be published. Children should never be the targets of violence and must not be put at risk of violence or encouraged to participate in violence. I again remind all concerned that lethal force may only be used in cases of extreme necessity, as a last resort, in response to an imminent threat of death or risk of serious injury.

To read the full statement see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23100&LangID=E>

UN experts urge Israel not to deport Human Rights Watch official Omar Shakir

UN human rights experts* have called on the Government of Israel to rescind its decision of 7 May to cancel the work permit of Omar Shakir, the Israel and Palestine Director for Human Rights Watch, who is based in Jerusalem.

“The decision to revoke Mr. Shakir’s work permit appears connected solely to his human rights research and advocacy,” they noted, “not to any allegation of wrongdoing”.

“Deporting Mr. Shakir sends a troubling message that Israel resists the kind of human rights fact-finding and debate that Human Rights Watch and other domestic and international non-governmental organisations conduct all of the time, in almost every part of the world.”

In March 2017, Israel initially refused to grant a work permit for Mr. Shakir. At the time, UN experts urged the Israeli Government to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and organisations, and to withdraw and rescind all restrictive legislation targeting human rights defenders. They are renewing their call in this fresh appeal.”

According to public reports and statements, the Government of Israel cancelled Mr. Shakir’s work permit in light of his alleged advocacy in the past for the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. Human Rights Watch has stated explicitly that it does not take a position on the BDS movement, nor do its employees.

“We fear that this decision is part of a troubling trend by the Israeli Government to restrict and shrink the space of human rights defenders who are critical of its record in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” said the UN experts. “We have previously identified concerns, for example, with Israel’s restrictions on human rights NGOs.”

The UN experts, while taking no position on BDS, remind the Government that

expressing support for or opposition to BDS remains firmly protected by the rights to freedom of opinion and expression. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23102&LangID=E>

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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

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

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

Measures to further improve the effectiveness of the fight against illegal content online (closing date 25 June 2018)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-measures-further-improve-effectiveness-fight-against-illegal-content-online_en

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>

Antisemitism: Survey of European Jews (closing date not stated)

<http://www.eurojews.eu/>

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