

Political Affairs Digest

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

Contents

Home Affairs
Israel

Relevant Legislation
Consultations

Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Racially Aggravated Offences: Lancashire

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [145549] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many incidents of race hate crime were recorded in Lancashire in (a) 2015, (b) 2016 and (c) 2017.

Nick Hurd: The Home Office collects and publishes information on the number of hate crime offences recorded by the police by monitored strand, including racial hate crime, in England and Wales by financial year and Police Force Area. The latest data are available here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/651921/prc-hate-crime-open-data.ods

Data for 2017/18 are due to be published in October 2018.

This Government is committed to tackling hate crime. The UK has a strong legislative framework and there is a cross Government approach through the Hate Crime Action Plan, due to be refreshed later this year.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-18/145549/>

Racial Hatred: Coventry

Jim Cunningham (Labour) [146095] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many incidents of race hate crime have been recorded in Coventry in each year since 2010.

Nick Hurd: The Home Office collects and publishes information on the number of hate crime offences recorded by the police by monitored strand, including racial hate crime, in England and Wales. Data are not available at a lower geographical level than Police Force Area. The latest data, including figures for the West Midlands, are published here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/651921/prc-hate-crime-open-data.ods

Data for 2017/18 are due to be published in October 2018.

This Government is committed to tackling hate crime. The UK has a strong legislative framework and there is a cross Government approach through the Hate Crime Action Plan, due to be refreshed later this year.

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House of Lords Oral Answers

Sharia Law

Baroness Cox (Crossbench): To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of the report of the independent review of the application of sharia law in England and Wales, published on 1 February.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, the Government are grateful for the independent review team's analysis and comprehensive report. The review found evidence of a range of practices across sharia councils, including women being forced to make concessions to gain a divorce. This is not acceptable. The Government responded to the review's recommendations in a Written Ministerial Statement on 1 February 2018 and in the *Integrated Communities Strategy*.

Baroness Cox: My Lords, I thank the Minister for her sympathetic reply and welcome the Government's response to the sharia law review, which reflects the measures in my Private Member's Bill which would require all religious marriages to be legally registered, thereby eradicating the vulnerability of Muslim women in the application of sharia law in this country, whereby a man can divorce his wife merely by saying "I divorce you" three times, and there is widespread polygamy, causing great unhappiness. One Muslim lady told me, "I feel betrayed by Britain. I came here to get away from this, and it's worse here than in the country from which I came". Therefore, I ask the Minister whether Her Majesty's Government will make it a priority to respond urgently with appropriate legislation, because many Muslim women are suffering in this country in ways which would make our suffragettes turn in their graves.

Baroness Manzoor: I share the concerns of the noble Baroness and those raised in the review that some couples may marry in a way that does not give them the legal protections available to others in a civilly registered marriage. We have committed to explore the legal and practical challenges relating to marriage reform, and the Ministry of Justice will be taking this work forward.

Baroness Donaghy (Labour): My Lords, in my experience, at the heart of conciliation, arbitration and mediation, consent is crucial. There are now widespread concerns regarding the nature of consent given prior to sharia council hearings. Women may be pressured by their families into going to these councils and may lack knowledge of both the English language and their rights under English law. Does the Minister agree that this is an issue of equal rights for women? May I press her on how the Government will ensure the rights of Muslim women and ensure that the rule of law is upheld?

Baroness Manzoor: I entirely agree with the noble Baroness. As I have already stated, the Government are taking this issue very seriously and we will be undertaking further work to look at how sharia councils and sharia law work. People can abide by sharia principles if they wish. Individuals are free to go to their priest, imam or any other faith leader, but we want to ensure that these actions do not conflict with the law and people are not left vulnerable and discriminated against.

Lord Elton (Conservative): In assessing the scale of this problem, do Her Majesty's Government take into account the, I believe, considerable number of people living in closed communities who are under severe pressure, social and otherwise, not to tarnish a family's honour by going to British law and who may not even speak the English language? They are not likely to show on the radar or to give evidence to inquiries. This problem seems to me bigger and more urgent than Her Majesty's Government are giving it credit for.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, the review that was undertaken recognised that there was an issue and made three recommendations: one was to look at marriage law reform; the second was on raising awareness; the third was to look at regulating sharia councils. I say to my noble friend that other women who go to sharia law have a need to go there because they feel it is necessary. At the same

time, we have to raise much more awareness about them going to have their marriage registered civilly.

Baroness Flather (Crossbench): My Lords, I have spoken on this subject at every opportunity in your Lordships' House. It is really appalling that we have an Equality and Human Rights Commission, but Muslim women have no equality and no human rights. It is really time to get into this issue properly. We have to look at the whole question of sharia. All the scholars have accepted that sharia discriminates against women not just in marriage or divorce but in every respect. A man can get a divorce by walking in ... My question is: when are the Government going to take the issue properly, not just piecemeal with a bit here and a bit there? The issue is really with the whole of sharia application, which should never have been allowed in this country.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, the Government do take this issue very seriously, and that is why we undertook a review. The review's findings were put in place on 1 February and a Ministerial Statement was made. However, we must ensure that reform of marriage is not done in a piecemeal fashion because it is a complex area of legislation. We are looking at that area carefully and, as I said, within the communities we are putting much greater effort into working with other organisations such as advice centres, voluntary organisations and NGOs to raise much greater awareness so that these issues can be tackled.

Lord Paddick (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, the report says that, "those proposing a ban on sharia councils provide no counter proposal or any solution for anyone seeking a religious divorce ... We consider the closure of sharia councils is not a viable option". Do the Government agree?

Baroness Manzoor: Sharia councils provide a service for some of the women who need to go to them, but they are not a viable solution in terms of equality for those women. We are therefore trying to raise awareness among sharia councils and the women who go to them—90% of the work done by those councils in fact regards divorce. Raising awareness will ensure that sharia councils themselves ensure that they are signposting correctly for those women.

Baroness Corston (Labour): My Lords, as I understand it, the provisions of sharia law are that an allegation of rape can be heard only if the act is witnessed by two men. Given that this is almost never the case, how on earth can an allegation of rape be successful under sharia law?

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, UK law has primacy and sharia law does not. The Government take that view very strongly. Where there have been cases of rape, as the noble Baroness has mentioned, sharia councils must ensure that they signpost correctly the legal remedies that are available. I hasten to add that, at the end of the day, we must ensure that the women themselves are aware of what their rights are in the UK.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-05-24/debates/2A29E13B-AF77-4292-B938-5065C812EFAB/ShariaLaw>

The Review referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/678473/6.4152_HO_CPGF_Report_into_Sharia_Law_in_the_UK_PRINT.pdf

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-02-01/debates/18020149000008/FaithPractices>

The Strategy referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

House of Lords Written Answers

Prisons: Ministers of Religion

Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Labour) [HL7767] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Keen of Elie on 4 January (HL4280), what meetings they have had about the development of the assurance and compliance process for the future delivery of chaplaincies in prisons; and which faith leaders have been involved in any such discussions.

Lord Keen of Elie: The future of the Assurance and Compliance process for Chaplaincy will be discussed with those Faith Advisers who sit on Chaplaincy Council at the joint meeting with the Chaplaincy HQ Team on the 12th June 2018. This will be followed by an invitation for those Faith Advisers not present at the meeting to comment by post or email.

We recognise the importance of faith and the positive impact that it can have on the lives of offenders, which is why there are multi-faith chaplaincy teams in every prison.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-10/HL7767/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-12-18/HL4280/>

Prisons: Ministers of Religion

Lord Murphy of Torfaen (Labour) [HL7768] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the current requirement for a prisoner to receive a pastoral visit from a chaplain within 24 hours of requesting one will be carried into any future policy framework.

Lord Keen of Elie: Whilst the future policy framework(s) in relation to chaplaincy have not yet been agreed, HM Government recognises the value of the pastoral care offered by Chaplains. Any new policy will ensure such care is available in a timely manner which reflects its importance in the overall care of those in prison.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-10/HL7768/>

TOP

Israel

Westminster Hall Debate

Gaza: Humanitarian Situation

col 439WH **Louise Haigh (Labour):** ... The situation in Gaza for its 1.8 million residents is nothing short of inhumane ...

The brutal response to the protests on the Gaza border during the last two months are a mark of shame on a deadlocked international community, giving succour to an Israeli Government acting with a lethal culture of impunity....

Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge explicitly the responsibility of Hamas in stoking the protests and provoking Israel. Hamas is a terrorist organisation that refuses to recognise the right of Israel to exist, and Israel has a right to defend itself. As an occupying force, however, Israel must be held accountable for its actions and the attacks on protestors. ...

The UK Government's decision to abstain in the Security Council vote was ... shameful. Last Tuesday, the Minister assured the House that he endorsed calls for an international, independent and transparent inquiry into the appalling events unfolding in Gaza, yet

when the UN Human Rights Council resolved on Friday to set up a commission of inquiry to undertake precisely that, the UK failed to join 29 partner countries and abstained in the vote. ...

col 440WH **Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour):** We should all agree that the slaughter of unarmed civilians in Gaza is abhorrent. We need to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people at this time. While I agree with my hon. Friend on a UN-led inquiry, does she agree that a two-state solution is the only solution to the conflict ...?

Louise Haigh: I agree. ...

On the unacceptability of an Israeli-led inquiry, I ask the Minister: what does it say about the upholders of a rules-based international order that one of its principal architects, the UK, would allow the alleged perpetrators of violations of international law to conduct the investigation themselves? It makes an utter mockery of the international order. ...

The direct and immediate humanitarian consequence of the Israeli security forces' actions has been on hospitals in Gaza. Even prior to this series of protest-related mass-casualty events, Gaza's health system was, according to the World Health Organisation, already "on the brink of collapse". ...

col 441WH **Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat):** ... there is another aspect to all of this. I visited Gaza when I first visited Palestine about 10 years ago, and I saw the rudimentary hospital conditions there at that time—goodness knows how they must be now. However, if I wanted to go back, I would not be able to, because it is next to impossible for parliamentarians from the United Kingdom to get into Gaza. ...

col 442WH **Louise Haigh:** ... The ongoing psychosocial, as well as physiological, implications of the woundings around the protest and of continued life under the blockade and the occupation cast a very long shadow for the entire Palestinian people. ...

Chi Onwurah (Labour): ... Does [Louise Haigh] agree that that situation legitimately demands protest—that it is legitimate to protest against it, regardless of the responsibility of Hamas or others for stoking the protests? Does she agree that the failure of the Israeli Government to allow and enable peaceful protest is not only causing the mental health issues, but ensuring that the situation grows worse and that there seems to be no other way but violent protest?

Louise Haigh: ... The illegal blockade and the continuing occupation of Gaza by the Israeli Government are a fundamental part of the issue facing Gaza. ...

The recent mass-casualty event has only exacerbated a whole-system collapse in Gaza. ...

col 443WH Gaza now has daily blackouts of 18 to 20 hours, meaning that patients who rely on life-saving medical equipment are put at risk on a daily basis, and hospitals generally cannot function at their full capacity to ensure the health and wellbeing of patients. Water desalination facilities have been severely impacted by the lack of electricity. The impact on the hygiene and public health of the population is severe and a matter of grave concern, as sewage water cannot be treated or pumped away from residential areas. ...

Is it any wonder, in these conditions, that what the former Prime Minister David Cameron called an "open-air prison" is a hotbed for extremism? ...

col 444WH **Richard Burden (Labour):** ... perhaps the greatest humanitarian issue of all is the right to life. More than 100 Palestinians have been killed and more than 12,000 injured since 30 March, most from the use of live fire by the Israeli military. I will press the Minister on the accountability for those deaths and injuries. ...

Israel announced that it will conduct its own inquiry into the events in Gaza, as my hon. Friend said. Answering the urgent question on Monday, the Minister said that if such an inquiry "is done solely by the Israeli legislative and judicial system, it is unlikely to carry the sort of confidence that the international community is looking for."

col 445WH He was not kidding about that. The United Nations commission of inquiry on the 2014 Gaza conflict said in 2015 that Israel has a "lamentable track record in holding

wrongdoers accountable”. ...

In the past two years, export licences to Israel have been provided for categories of arms and arms components including sniper and assault rifles, pistols, weapon sights, targeting equipment, ammunition for small arms and grenades, smoke canisters, tanks, combat and military helicopters, military support and combat aircraft and civil riot control protection equipment. The consolidated arms export criteria, under which the UK operates, say that licences should not be granted if there is a serious risk that arms or arms components will be used for “internal repression or in the commission of a serious violation of international humanitarian law”, and that the need “not to affect adversely regional stability in any significant way” must be considered.

There is widespread concern about whether UK-supplied weapons or components have been used in Gaza. ...

col 447WH **Joan Ryan (Labour):** ... Last week’s tragic events on the Gaza border underline the need for urgent action to address the plight of the Palestinian people. In the past decade, Gaza has endured three wars. Ending the spiral of violence requires us to tackle the toxic cocktail of hopelessness and desperation that underpins it. As Labour Friends of Israel set out in its pledge for Gaza earlier this year, we need a multifaceted approach, with political, diplomatic and economic strands.

First, Israel should lead an international effort to assist with the economic revitalisation of Gaza. ...

col 448WH Secondly, the international community should honour the reconstruction pledges made at the Cairo conference in 2014. ...

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority’s control over Gaza must be reasserted. ...

Finally, the root of Gaza’s problems lays in the brutal rule of Hamas. It has deprived the people of their civil rights, including their right to new elections. It has used Gaza as a base from which to launch terrorist and rocket attacks on Israel and, as the Red Crescent made clear last year, shown callous disregard for the lives of the Gazan people. ...

col 449WH **Grahame Morris (Labour):** ... the Gaza blockade began long before Hamas came to power in Gaza. I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends that it started with Israel cancelling the general exit permit out of the Gaza strip in 1991. To suggest that the current situation in Gaza is down to Hamas alone does not fit into the facts or the realities on the ground. Gaza has been accurately described as a vast open prison, a strip of territory hermetically sealed from the outside world by Israel and Egypt. ...

The irony is that Gaza does potentially have some natural resources and some opportunity to trade, not least the quite extensive gas reserves that have been discovered off the coast, with an estimated value of \$4 billion. Israel’s military completely destroyed Gaza’s seaports in 2002 and its airport in 2001. That prevents Palestinians from engaging in direct trade with the outside world. Palestinians are barred from using about 20% of their own land space, as this is kept as a buffer zone, which Israel maintains as a kill zone, whereby Palestinians risk death if they dare to enter the area near the Gaza fence.

Not a single rocket has been fired from Gaza in the last two months, yet Israel, as we have seen, has used lethal violence against Palestinians in Gaza, while the Israelis are claiming to be the victims. ... Israel has multiple non-lethal methods of addressing civilian protests, and it uses them frequently. It has much expertise in such methods. Indeed, it sells them to the rest of the world. In the opinion of many, shooting live ammunition into mass, dense protests—indeed, any protest—is a war crime, and there must be repercussions. ...

col 451WH **Stephen Timms (Labour):** ... I affirm Hamas’s culpability in what is happening, but ... what happened on the part of the Israeli army was nevertheless disproportionate and illegal. ...

col 452WH We all dearly want to see a two-state solution—a secure Israel alongside an autonomous and independent Palestinian state—but we can all see that time is running out for achieving that solution. ... the viability of a two-state solution is being continually

eroded by the establishment of settlements pepper-potting Palestine. ...

Lyn Brown (Labour): ... Monday 14 May will go down as a dark day in history. In Jerusalem, crowds listened to Baptist minister Robert Jeffress reading a prayer to mark the opening of the American embassy—a man who has previously made deeply offensive comments about Jews, Muslims, Mormons and gay people. In Tel Aviv, people danced the night away to the music of their new Eurovision winner, Netta. And in Gaza, an hour or so down the coast, 60 people, including children, were killed under live fire. ...
col 453WH I do not defend or dispute the disgraceful conduct of Hamas. They waved swastikas in the protests, which was a simply awful thing to do. They supplied maps to protesters, with directions to homes in the nearest Jewish communities. They spread downright lies about breaches in the fence, manipulating protesters and encouraging them to run towards the heavily armed and fortified fence. They have also claimed that 50 of the 60 people who died on 14 May were part of their organisation. I understand this, and I do not condone it—in fact, I utterly and totally condemn it.

However, I think that most of us can agree that the response of the Israeli Government was massively disproportionate. I think it came from a legacy of seeing the people of Gaza as nothing more than a security threat and shamefully denying their humanity, their rights and the conditions in which they have been living. In every so-called “Gaza war”, we have seen civilians being treated like enemy soldiers. It is a systemic problem. ...

col 454WH ... when the blockade began, Israeli defence officials calculated the bare minimum of food needed to avoid malnutrition in Gaza. Surely that was not necessary for security. As my right hon. Friend also said, 54 Palestinians died last year waiting for travel permits, which they needed to receive life-saving medical care outside the Gaza strip. Surely that was not necessary for security. Now in Gaza, as we have heard, there are about four hours of electricity each day; between 90% and 97% of the water is contaminated, mainly by sewage; food is scarce; 80% of people are dependent on foreign aid; and, for some children, breakfast is a cup of hot water with a sprinkle of salt. Is that what security has to look like? ...

col 456WH **Andy Slaughter (Labour):** ... In three wars on Gaza—not just Protective Edge, which was the most recent in 2014, but Pillar of Defence in 2012 and Cast Lead—more than 5,000 Palestinians died. Most of them were civilians, and many were children. That is a consequence of waging war on a very densely populated civilian area. Obviously those wars were far more severe than what has happened in recent weeks, but we saw what happened in recent weeks. Often we do not see what happens in Gaza as a result of bombing and shelling, or we can only bear witness to it afterwards. Some 53% of injuries between the end of March and the middle of May were by live fire—the majority. We saw people a long way back from the border being picked off by sniper fire, and weaponry being used that maimed and permanently maimed. That is not accidental; it is a deliberate strategy. Even if one accepted a need for Israel to use force in the circumstances, I do not believe for a moment that that type of force or that type of weaponry or live fire needed to be used. That is what is so outrageous. ...

The point is often made by supporters of the Israeli Government that although Israel withdrew, that did not solve the problem. The motivation for withdrawal, given what has since happened with the wars and blockade, was less to do with the withdrawal of relatively small numbers of settlers—certainly as compared with what has happened in the west bank—than it was about demography. It is about Israel having its cake and eating it. ... Israel does not want a one-state solution, but it makes a two-state solution impossible, so the compromise is the creation of these Bantustans like Gaza. That is what withdrawal from Gaza is about: it is about isolating almost 2 million Palestinians so that they do not count, and do not raise questions about why they do not get a vote and why a one-state solution is not possible. ...

col 457WH I have no more time for Hamas than anyone else who has spoken. It did win a free and fair election in 2006, but its conduct since then has placed it beyond the pale. ...

col 458WH I cannot for the life of me understand why, given that—as we repeat constantly—settlements are illegal under international law, we say that it is a matter of choice for people in the UK to buy settlement goods. Settlement goods should not be available, and British companies that support settlements, financially or otherwise, should not be doing so. ...

col 459WH **Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat):** ... I regret the United Kingdom's abstention in the United Nations Human Rights Council vote last week. It is a principle of natural justice that nobody should be a judge in their own cause. Even if we thought that Israel could be relied on to conduct an investigation into what has gone on there in recent weeks, notwithstanding all the evidence to the contrary, we should not wish to see that happen, and Israel herself, if she is to respect the norms of international law, should not seek to do so. ...

col 463WH **Alan Brown (SNP):** ... Israeli campaigners highlight how the settlers have been removed from Gaza and that Gaza is therefore under the control of Palestinians, as though that has been a good move. However, that makes it easier for the Israeli Government to control the Gazan population. People bristle at the term "apartheid", but if the Gazan population is completely hemmed in, is that not apartheid? ...

col 464WH On Thursday 17 May, the Israeli ambassador to the UK held a meeting with the Scottish Government's External Affairs Secretary, Fiona Hyslop. She delivered a forceful message on behalf of the Scottish Government that the 50 years of Palestinian oppression, the illegal occupation of the west bank, the illegal expansion of settlements and the illegal siege of Gaza must end, and that a two-state solution must be found to bring peace in the region. The Scottish National party also supports the UN Secretary-General's call for independent investigations to be carried out following the recent conflict ...

We need the UK Government to step up to the plate. It was shocking that they did not vote for an independent investigation into the killings by the IDF. The UK Government have so far refused to back calls that trade with the illegal settlements should be halted. Such trade clearly gives legitimacy to the settlements ... The UK Government have also refused to demand compensation for aid-funded structures that have been demolished. They call for an easing of the blockade rather than a proper public statement that the blockade is completely illegal and should be lifted. As we have heard, they continue to sell arms to Israel ...

col 470WH **The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** ... quite a number of colleagues who have strong positions, particularly in support of Palestinians, made very strong remarks about Hamas, and about recognising the good things in Israel. Those points are not always heard. ... the issue has become incredibly binary. I know what Members who have spoken in the debate will get on Twitter and Facebook tonight, because I get it as well. There is no acceptance on one side or the other of anything that remotely reflects the complexities and difficulties that have to be faced. All hon. Members who have spoken will receive something tonight from someone who will be bitter and abusive about something said in the debate that they have picked up on one way or the other. ...

On my last visit to the west bank, I talked to the Palestinian leadership. After years of working on the basis of going for statehood, the concern is what their process will be if that does not happen. Who do they talk to then? How do we move forward? In Gaza, the hopelessness caused by a combination of governance by Hamas and the pressures put upon the area from Israel has left a miserable situation where so many people are dependent on humanitarian access—the smell of the sea and all that sort of thing.

There are things we do not talk a lot about. We do not much talk about the difficulties and failures of Palestinian political reconciliation, or the lack of democratic accountability. We do not talk much about incitement to terror and the commemoration of those who have committed acts of quite serious atrocity on others. That is because we cannot cover everything, but it is also a part of the mindset that has led to this binary situation where

neither one side nor the other can move.

Israel sees everything in Gaza as a potential security threat. ... it sees the waters as a place from which attacks can be launched—because they were. It sees approaches to the border fence as a potential for attack—because they were. There is a strong sense from those in leadership in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem that security therefore trumps everything else.

Of course, there is a point beyond which it cannot go. I have made the point on behalf of the Government that defence and security are about more than just having more weapons than your opponent. Ultimately, the security that we need is provided because of the relationship we have with our friends and neighbours. ...

col 471WH We have been in close contact with international partners to monitor the humanitarian situation in Gaza. In relation to the immediate issue, I am in urgent consultation with the International Committee of the Red Cross to support its appeal. ...

UK aid to the occupied territories provides essential health and education services, helps to build strong state institutions, promotes economic prosperity and supports the most vulnerable, including refugees. ...

col 472WH The United Kingdom opposed the United States' decision to move its embassy because we were concerned, first, that it broke an international convention and a UN resolution on the status of Jerusalem and, secondly, that it indicated a move by the United States that made its position more difficult as an important interlocutor in this difficult situation. ...

col 473WH The situation in Gaza is complex, and the actions of non-state actors such as Hamas make the situation extremely difficult. We recognise Israel's legitimate security concerns and urge Hamas to renounce violence and move towards the Quartet principles long needed for peace. ...

The UK continues fully to support the need for an independent investigation into the Gaza protests and the response to them ...

There is a need to establish the facts, including why such a volume of live fire has been used and the role that Hamas has played. ...

col 475WH The restrictions imposed on movement and access to Gaza contribute significantly to the pressures that the Gazan people face. ...

col 476WH We note Israel's recent efforts to ensure the delivery of goods to Gaza, despite the serious damage done at the Kerem Shalom crossing by protestors during recent weeks. We will continue to work hard with Israel for an increase in the entry of goods to Gaza to stimulate economic activity. ...

... medical facilities are already stretched by the long-standing shortages of medical, electricity and fuel supplies. Delays in approvals for medical referrals and difficulty in reaching facilities mean that people have to wait a long time for medical treatment. ...

The tragic events during the recent protests at the Gaza border have exacerbated the chronic strain on the health system. Emergency services are overwhelmed and overstretched, and the WHO is calling for essential drugs, medical disposables and medical kits for surgery and trauma. The ICRC recently stated that the health system is close to collapse, which is why we are in urgent consultation with it at this moment. ...

col 478WH The UK is committed to addressing the underlying cause of humanitarian strife in Gaza—it is so pertinent to what we have been discussing—by increasing our support for economic development. ...

col 479WH We recognise that the windows that we have all been looking for are closing very quickly. If not two-state, what? If we are not now to move forward, when? ... I hope and believe that the balanced position we seek to take, recognising the complexities, and that having this debate read in many different capitals around the place will enable states and friends of both Israel and the Palestinians to recognise Parliament's desire for peace, its understanding of the complexities of the situation, and its determination to recognise that the humanitarian situation of those affected has now reached such a state that there must be an even greater degree of urgency than before. ...

To read the full transcript see

House of Commons Written Answers

Middle East: Peace Negotiations

Rosie Duffield (Labour) [144975] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the Middle East peace process continues in a fair and legitimate manner.

Alistair Burt: At this highly sensitive time in the region, there is an urgent need to restart the peace process between Israel and Palestine. We regularly press both parties to resume direct negotiations towards a two-state solution. The Foreign Secretary spoke to Palestinian Authority President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 May and reiterated the need for progress.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-16/144975/>

Israel: Arms Trade

Ann Clwyd (Labour) [145279] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what role his Department has in ensuring that UK arms exports to Israel are not being used in contravention of UK National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

Alistair Burt: We assess all applications very carefully against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. Human rights and international humanitarian law considerations are important parts of that assessment. We keep the situation under constant review.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-17/145279/>

Israel: Palestinians

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [146118] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on securing peace in Gaza.

Alistair Burt: There is an urgent need to address the situation in Gaza. I most recently discussed Gaza with Jason Greenblatt, the President's Special Representative for International Negotiations, on 4 April. I stressed the need for restraint and discussed the importance of bringing forward proposals to address the situation in Gaza. The Foreign Secretary discussed the situation in Gaza with Jared Kushner in Washington DC on 7 May. Our Embassy in Washington DC also regularly discusses the situation in Gaza with US Government officials.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-21/146118/>

Palestinians: Syria

Caroline Lucas (Green) [146195] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation of Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk camp in southern Damascus; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt: Yarmouk camp has been effectively besieged for several years. Despite the regime takeover in recent days, humanitarian access to Yarmouk continues to be denied. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, supported by DFID, has had no direct access to the camp since April 2015.

We continue to call on all parties to protect civilians, and to allow humanitarian agencies unfettered access to provide aid to those most in need, including at the UN Security Council and the International Syria Support Group. The Secretary of State for International Development and I focused on these messages at the 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region' Conference in Brussels on 24 and 25 April.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-21/146195/>

Palestinians: Syria

Caroline Lucas (Green) [146196] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps he is taking to ensure protection and relief to Palestinian refugees affected by the conflict in Syria; and whether her Department has any plans to increase the UK's contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Alistair Burt: We continue to call on all parties to protect civilians in Syria, including Palestinian refugees, and to allow humanitarian agencies unfettered access to provide aid to those most in need, including at the UN Security Council and the International Syria Support Group. The Secretary of State for International Development and I focused on these messages at the 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region Conference' held in Brussels on 24 and 25 April.

DFID supports UNRWA's Syria Emergency Appeal which provides 418,000 Palestinian Refugees in Syria (PRS) with cash and in-kind food assistance. This includes providing 254,000 internally displaced PRS with blankets, mattresses and hygiene kits in addition to livelihood, education and protection assistance.

UK officials and the Minister for the Middle East work closely with UNRWA, PRS host governments, and partners to maintain the continuity of essential services to Palestinian refugees. The UK will deliver its next round of financial support for UNRWA's core budget earlier than originally planned, to help meet the growing needs of Palestinian refugees across the region. Officials continue to monitor UNRWA's evolving financial situation closely.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-05-21/146196/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Israel: Racial Discrimination

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated): To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to provide support to the Palestinian Authority in its complaint against Israel to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and if so, how.

Baroness Goldie: My Lords, the United Kingdom is not planning to provide support to this complaint. We continue to raise our strong concerns about the ongoing impact of the occupation with the Government of Israel and the UK remains a significant supporter of the Palestinian Authority and its state-building efforts. The occupation and the problems that come with it will be ended only through a negotiated peace settlement leading to a two-state solution, which the UK actively supports.

Baroness Tonge: My Lords, is the Minister aware that there are 65 laws in Israel that discriminate unjustly against non-Jewish people of that country? Surely, I do not have to list the discrimination and cruelty meted out against the people of the Occupied Territories and Gaza, most recently by the slaughter of 110 people and the injuring of thousands more. Does this not remind the Minister of the Sharpeville shootings in apartheid South Africa a generation ago? Does she agree that it is time to call time on the apartheid Government of Israel?

Baroness Goldie: I think it is time to call time on the appalling and intractable situation between the Palestinian Authority and the state of Israel. That is why, globally, and certainly within the United Kingdom, there is a determined, concerted and consistent effort to assist the Middle East peace process and encourage the parties to refrain from provocative action—on both sides. The noble Baroness is right to refer to the recent scenes in Gaza. We have never disputed that they were appalling and deeply upsetting, but the United Kingdom Government have made clear that while we recognise the right of the Palestinians to engage in peaceful process and protest, there is a profound concern that that process was hijacked by terrorists. Equally, we recognise the right of Israel, if it thinks its security is at risk, to act proportionately in self-defence.

Lord Pannick (Crossbench): Does the Minister agree that a complaint by the Palestinian Authority about race discrimination would have more credibility if its President were to refrain from crude anti-Semitism? Did the Minister see, earlier this month, the report on the BBC News website and elsewhere of the speech made by Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah, in which he said that the Holocaust was provoked by Jews, in particular by reason of their “usury and banking and such”?

Baroness Goldie: We were aware of President Abbas’s comments at the Palestinian National Council. These comments were deeply concerning because any attempt to justify or explain away any element of the Holocaust is completely unacceptable. We understand that he has apologised and we welcome that apology. We understand that he has also shown a commitment to non-violence and to a two-state solution.

Lord Turnberg (Labour): My Lords, does the Minister agree that accusations of racial discrimination by Israel fly in the face of the fact that 20% of Israeli citizens are Arabs, that 17 members of the Knesset are Arabs elected by the population, and that many leaders of the medical profession, academe and the arts and music, are Arabs? A Supreme Court judge who is an Arab sat in judgment on Ehud Olmert when he was put away recently. While the Palestinian leadership and the Israeli leadership are far from beyond criticism, it is hard to sustain an argument that Israel is an apartheid state.

Baroness Goldie: In relation to the original Question posed by the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, the form of complaint made to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is significant, because I understand that this is the first interstate treaty complaint that has been brought. It means that Israel will be required to submit written evidence within three months and the committee will then investigate the claims made. That offers a forum for investigation of the grievance that the Palestinian Authority feels, but it is for the committee to look at the matter and prepare a report with recommendations.

The Lord Bishop of Worcester: My Lords, while argument goes on internationally about who was responsible for what happened in Gaza, is the Minister aware of the enormous suffering that continues there, particularly since the dreadful events of a little while ago? At the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, run by the Anglican Church in Gaza, for example, the situation is described as critical. Is the Minister aware of that? What humanitarian aid is being provided to the people of Gaza at present, particularly to those injured?

Baroness Goldie: The United Kingdom has made it clear that it is not only aware of the humanitarian situation in Gaza but deeply concerned about it. We continue to ensure that our programmes can be responsive to what we would describe as spikes in need. We are closely monitoring that situation. As the right reverend Prelate will be aware, the UK works in close contact with relevant United Nations agencies, the ICRC and other donors to keep abreast of humanitarian needs and assess whether the UK should contribute funding to these partners.

Baroness Eaton (Conservative): The only way to achieve the lasting peace that we all want to see is for both Israel and the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table without preconditions. With that in mind, how are the United Kingdom Government helping to facilitate the resumption of direct peace talks?

Baroness Goldie: I thank my noble friend. The UK's long-standing position on the Middle East peace process is that we support a negotiated settlement. We want that to lead to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. We wish that based on the 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states and, importantly, a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. That is where the UK is in relation to this issue. We prosecute that case with all parties as robustly as we can. As my noble friend will be aware, we are part of and support the quartet process.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-05-24/debates/DECB5229-10C9-40EC-A5E9-5E6CEEFB8A43/IsraelRacialDiscrimination>

House of Lords Written Answer

Gaza: Health Services

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL7951] To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of Israel about the scale of acute and long-term medical care available to those injured in the protests at the border with Gaza between 30 March and 14 May, including the provision of increased resources in Gaza and access to facilities on the West Bank and in Israel.

Lord Bates: The UK maintains regular contact with the Israeli authorities, and we most recently raised our concerns about the situation in Gaza with the office for the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) last week. UK officials expressed concern about the health system in Gaza, and reiterated the importance of unimpeded access and protection for humanitarian goods and personnel. Officials also urged COGAT to allow fuel to enter through the Kerem Shalom crossing and to approve medical permits for the injured.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-05-16/HL7951/>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Grahame Morris (Labour) (1318) Condemnation of the massacre of Palestinian protestors along the Gaza fence – That this House calls on the Government to unequivocally condemn the massacre of Palestinian protestors along the Gaza border fence which has led to the deaths of at least 62 unarmed civilians and the injuring of thousands more, including 1,359 with gunshot injuries admitted to hospitals in a single day on Monday 14 May 2018; demands that the Government reaffirm the rights of protected persons under belligerent occupation and insist on an independent investigation into the unlawful use of live ammunition against protestors as well as outlining actions and sanctions should such an investigation not take place; asks the Foreign Office to summon the Israeli Ambassador for an explanation into the massacre and reiterate that lethal force is an option of last resort in circumstances where there is an imminent threat to life; believes that the path to peace and a two state solution is being undermined by the Israeli Government which has deliberately engineered a humanitarian crisis in Gaza through the decade-long blockade, has taken provocative action with the relocation of the US Embassy in Jerusalem, has proactively undermined a viable Palestinian State through settlement building as well as violating the 4th Geneva Convention through the use of lethal force against civilians protesting for their right to return to their homes, including a Canadian doctor who was clearly identified and journalists covering the scene; and asks the Government to follow up that strong condemnation with tangible actions to prohibit further attacks on civilian protestors.

<https://www.parliament.uk/edm/2017-19/1318>

Cabinet Office

The Story of Israel: Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster speech to the Celebrating Israel at 70 event

It's the story of a people resolute in their struggle for a better future, but with a dream of peace one day in their land.

It is the story of Israel.

And at the heart of this story lies a simple idea, one which every person in this hall – no matter your faith, colour or creed – can believe in...

And that is the dream of a place to call home...

...a place where communities are born, memories are created, and dreams can flourish.

Israel's story has that truth at its core.

David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, once remarked that "to be a realist you must believe in miracles".

And it is fair to say that the story of Israel is one which has the belief in miracles at its heart. ...

The evil of the Holocaust was something I learned about when I was still a boy – and not just from the history books or TV documentaries.

Two boys in my class at school had fathers who had, by some miracle, survived Auschwitz.

I still remember vividly how being invited to tea at one friend's house, and how, during the conversation, his dad suddenly rolled up his shirt sleeve to show the death camp tattoo still scarred on his wrist.

The Holocaust, the Shoah, that darkest chapter in human history, serves as a reminder that all of us, wherever we are from, must stamp out hate and racial prejudice wherever we find it. ...

But despite all odds, the spirit of solidarity and endurance which sustained the Jewish people through centuries of exile also made possible the rise, out of the horror of the Holocaust, of the nation state of Israel. ...

Israel has grown into a thriving democracy and a prosperous economy

where the values of freedom, tolerance and the rule of law lie at its heart

where sexual, religious and racial equality is enshrined in law

and where argument, disagreement and dissent are hard-wired into the Israeli character. ...

Israel is a global leader in upholding the rights of women and members of the LGBT community

a leading innovator in science and technology

home to some of the world's finest emergency relief teams

the proud producer of no fewer than twelve Nobel Peace Prize winners ...

And these strengths directly benefit the United Kingdom too.

We are Israel's second largest trading partner

and we are Israel's number one destination for investment in Europe – with more than 300 Israeli companies operating here.

But our relationship is not simply one between governments – it is about those bonds between our peoples too.

Britain's Jewish population here in Britain is one of the most dynamic and vibrant communities that make up the diverse mix that is our modern United Kingdom.

From business to arts; to health, education, industry and literature – your contribution benefits us all ...

... let me be absolutely clear: antisemitism, in whatever form, has no place in our society and we will never, ever tolerate it.

It's why the design for our National Memorial to the Holocaust has now been chosen, and why that Memorial will stand next to our Parliament together with an accompanying education centre ...

It's why Theresa May was the first leader to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's modern definition of antisemitism and it's why, whatever the political disagreements between Israel and the United Kingdom have, antisemitism must never be allowed to survive by cloaking itself behind criticism of the policy of a particular Israeli government. ...

The United Kingdom will always support Israel's right and obligation to defend itself and her citizens.

But we believe too that lasting security will come through peace, mutual respect and reconciliation between Israel and all her neighbours.

And it isn't just politicians who want to see a confident and secure Israel able to prosper, and able to live in peace and security alongside an independent, peaceful Palestine state...

it is young Palestinians from Ramallah and Hebron and Gaza

and young Israelis from Sderot and Jerusalem and Tel Aviv

they all want the same things as each other

to go to school and university together

to meet; talk; laugh; debate; learn from each other

and ultimately love another. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-of-the-duchy-of-lancaster-speech-to-celebrating-israel-at-70-event>

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

European Union (Withdrawal) Bill

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

Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

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

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

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

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

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

TOP

Consultations ** new or updated today

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

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

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/>

TOP

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