

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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On Kristallnacht anniversary, UN chief urges renewed fight against 'crime' of anti-Semitism

Political leaders have not yet taken up their responsibility to speak out loudly against neo-Nazism, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Friday, warning that anti-Semitism is on the rise.

... the Secretary-General said that testimony from Holocaust survivors needed to be heard anew, and fully understood as an ever-present reminder of what can happen if societies let down their guard. "Anti-Semitism is back and it needs to be fought as the crime it is," Mr. Guterres said. He called on leaders and Governments to "clearly denounce and make evident the real risk of anti-Semitism in our societies today." ...

The name *Kristallnacht* comes from the shards of broken glass found on streets after windows of Jewish-owned buildings and synagogues were smashed during that night of violence in 1938. Mr. Guterres said that he was particularly touched by the imagery, since crystals had been symbols of beauty, horribly transformed since then, now coming to symbolize "the end of the age of denial about the Holocaust." ...

Also on Friday, the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) held an educators' workshop titled *Practical Tools for Celebrating Diversity and Antidiscrimination*, in observance of the Kristallnacht Pogrom and the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The event featured *Facing History & Ourselves* and a new online resource for teachers called *Stories That Move – a toolbox for antidiscrimination*.

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/11/1025361>

Facing History & Ourselves

<https://www.facinghistory.org/>

Stories That Move – a toolbox for antidiscrimination

<https://www.storiesthatmove.org/en/home/>

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House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11105] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the reported disparity of treatment between Palestinians accused of throwing stones and Israelis accused of the same action.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Government has concerns about Israel's use of a dual court system whereby Palestinians, except East Jerusalem residents, are subject to the Israeli military court system, irrespective of the charge, whereas Israeli settlers are dealt with by the Israeli civil justice system. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv last raised the issue of settler violence and the importance of accountability with the Israeli Ministry of Justice on 29 October. They also raised the case of the death of a Palestinian woman after stones were thrown at her car in the West Bank on 13 October, which is under investigation.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-29/HL11105/>

Jerusalem: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11106] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel regarding the banning of Palestinian flags in East Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not raised this issue with the Israeli authorities, we recognise that freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest are fundamental human rights. The UK is firmly committed to the promotion and protection of human rights and compliance with international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We will continue to raise concerns with the Israeli Government on compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of Israel's occupation of the OPTs.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-29/HL11106/>

West Bank: Demolition

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11107] To ask Her Majesty's Government what measures are in place to protect Palestinians living in the West Bank who wish to repair, improve or extend existing buildings from stop-work and demolition orders directed by the government of Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We call on the Israeli authorities to cease the policy of demolitions and instead provide a transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C that includes enabling Palestinians to repair, improve or extend existing buildings. The UK has also allocated £1.1 million to support essential infrastructure for vulnerable Palestinians in Area C. We are supporting four communities comprising nearly 500 Palestinian families living in Area C to remain on their land through improved infrastructure and access to community services, including education and health, in areas which have an outline plan in the Israeli approval process.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-29/HL11107/>

Jerusalem: Churches

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11108] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel regarding the proposal to

confiscate land belonging to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Officials at our Embassy in Tel Aviv have made representations to the Israeli authorities about this matter. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv and Consulate General in Jerusalem are closely following developments. We encourage the parties to uphold the status quo in Jerusalem.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-29/HL11108/>

Palestinians: Universities

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11109] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the obstacles to and restrictions on (1) student access to, and (2) the proper functioning of, Palestinian universities created by the government of Israel; and whether they intend to make representations to that government to mitigate such restrictions.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not made any assessment on this particular issue, we consistently urge Israel to ease movement and access restrictions across the Occupied Palestinian Territories, not least because of the impact that the restrictions have on continuity of education.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-29/HL11109/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11110] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the behaviour of Israeli forces towards Palestinian children travelling to and from school; and whether they intend to take steps to discourage any harassment of children by those forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not made any assessment on this particular issue, an official from our Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly meets the British Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme volunteers to hear about their experiences of monitoring checkpoints and providing a protective presence to children on their way to and from school. We have stressed the importance of the Israel Security Forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-29/HL11110/>

Khalida Jarrar

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL11128] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have made representations to the government of Israel about the administrative detention imposed since July 2017 of Ms Khalida Jarrar, an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly; and if so, what response they received.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We remain concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention. According to international law, this should be used only when security makes it absolutely necessary rather than as routine practice, and as a preventive rather than a punitive measure. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law and either charge or release detainees.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-30/HL11128/>

Palestine Refugee Agency Faces Greatest Financial Crisis in Its History Following 2018 Funding Cuts, Commissioner-General Tells Fourth Committee

... Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), said that, because of support from Member States, “we are on a path to overcoming the greatest financial predicament ever in the history of this Agency”. Stressing the importance of UNRWA’s services, he said there is no alternative to its school system in the Gaza Strip. He went on to note that the demolition of the West Bank Bedouin hamlet of Khan al-Ahmar is imminent, and access to the essentials of life precarious and insecure. In Syria, six students were killed by mortar and gunfire in 2018, and in Lebanon, refugees remain cut off from Government services and formal employment.

Turning to the Agency’s financial crisis, he reported that \$300 million in funding was cut in January following an abrupt decision by the United States, which has since announced that it will not contribute any funds as of 2019. The resulting financial crisis has been unprecedented, he said, citing a mid-January shortfall of \$446 million, equivalent to 40 per cent of the Agency’s operating income. It threatened general education for 525,000 students, essential primary health care for 3 million patients and food assistance for 1.7 million refugees who fled complex emergencies, including Syria. ...

Overall, donors contributed or pledged an additional \$382 million in 2018, reducing the shortfall to \$64 million, he said, expressing hope that it will be further reduced after additional contributions. ...

Regarding assertions about Palestine refugees in the media and certain political forums — including accusations that UNRWA is inflating the number of refugees it serves — he described them as blatant misrepresentations, pointing out: “Children born to refugees, and their descendants, are recognized as refugees by both UNRWA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) under their respective mandates.” ...

The observer for the State of Palestine highlighted the importance of the Agency’s youth initiatives and sought elaboration of its current and future projects for Palestinian youth.

The representative of Israel said the Palestinian population that UNRWA serves does not meet the criteria for refugee status under international law. Noting that 2.2 million are citizens of Jordan and 2.1 million live in Gaza and the West Bank, he said they have never crossed an international border. He also pointed out that UNRWA’s mandate permits it to define descendants as refugees, describing that as a political decision behind the spike in the Agency’s financial needs. He asked why UNRWA inflates the number of refugees in the region and how it functions in Gaza, where so many terrorist organizations, including UNRWA officials, are active.

The representative of Syria said that UNRWA’s reports continue to neglect the role of the Government of Syrian in humanitarian efforts for Palestine refugees. Noting that his country’s Government has treated them equally and generously, he said violence against the Palestinians has been perpetrated by armed terrorist groups who have attacked refugee camps in Syria. ...

Turning to Israel and the different interpretations of refugee issues, [Pierre Krähenbühl] reiterated that UNRWA’s actions in relation to its mandate are defined by the General Assembly. As such, the definitions that the Agency uses for refugees and the ways in which it has registered them have all been defined and validated by that body. ...

Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, observer for the State of Palestine, said UNRWA has been in crisis mode for a year, forced to contend with an unprecedented financial shortfall of \$446 million that jeopardizes its essential services and causes widespread distress among refugees. “We reject rhetoric aimed at redefining who constitutes a Palestine refugee in an attempt to strip our refugees of their status and rights,” she said, emphasizing that those rights do not diminish with time. The right to return is not a claim,

but a right which cannot be negated to accommodate Israel's narrative and its schemes to ensure a Jewish majority, she added. Under international law, children of refugees and their descendants are also considered refugees until a durable solution is found, she pointed out. ...

She went on to describe claims that UNRWA perpetuates the refugee problem as absurd and offensive, calling for the denunciation of any attempts to discredit the Agency. ... The forced displacement and dispossession of Palestine refugees by Israel, the occupying Power, has also inflicted a critical loss of hope, she observed. That is most damaging for young people, for whom the absence of a political horizon and the lack of opportunity have diminished belief in the possibilities of peace, making them more vulnerable to the forces of radicalism and extremism. ...

Such anxiety has been particularly severe in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and most acute in Gaza, as reflected in the protests and strikes to mark the Great March of Return, she continued. UNRWA remains a lifeline for refugee families in the enclave and elsewhere, especially for the Bedouin community currently at risk of another forced transfer. ...

Pierre-Christophe Chatzisavas, European Union delegation, warned that ending UNRWA's humanitarian activities could generate instability across the region and create a vacuum that will only serve extremists. ...

Isaac Bachman (Israel) said that until the Palestinians can provide their people with services comparable to those of UNRWA on their own, the international community should continue to provide the humanitarian support they need. However, it should redirect its support into other international channels, he said, describing UNRWA as a political organization. ... Furthermore, UNRWA refugees enjoy a special status that is automatically passed down to future generations, he noted, saying the phenomenon perpetuates and exacerbates the refugee problem. No other refugee population in the world has a similar dedicated agency, he noted....

Under the guise of the right of return, they are refusing, through UNRWA, to accept the Jewish right to self-determination, he said, adding that the Agency is the lynchpin of the campaign to dismantle the Jewish State of Israel. ...

The representative of Israel, speaking in exercise of the right of reply in response to mention of General Assembly resolution 194, he said it has no legal bearing and does not give the Palestinian people the right of return to Israel. Recalling that Arab countries rejected that resolution when it was adopted because it recognized the State of Israel, said the Palestinian people's ardent refusal to recognize the State of Israel is the root cause of the refugee problem....

The observer for the State of Palestine, also speaking in exercise of the right of reply, pointed out that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) recognized Israel's right to exist in 1993. Meanwhile, Israel has never accorded that right to the Palestinian people or to the State of Palestine, she noted. Emphasizing that the refugee question has nothing to do with recognition of Israel's sovereignty, she said Palestinians share the same right to which all refugees around the world are entitled, and are insisting on their rights under international law. Israel is making Palestine refugees the exception by denying their right of return, she stressed, recalling that after the 1949 armistice, Israel refused Palestine refugees the right to return to their homes. She underlined that peace remain elusive because of Israel's desire to impose a Jewish majority, regardless of international law human rights and the minimum requirements of decency and morality.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gaspd684.doc.htm>

Report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

<https://undocs.org/en/A/73/349>

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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>

Online Forums Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/onlineforums.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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Consultations ** new or updated today

Reform of the legal requirements for divorce (closing date 10 December 2018)

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/reform-of-the-legal-requirements-for-divorce/>

The future of civil partnership in Scotland (closing date 21 December 2018)

<https://consult.gov.scot/family-law/the-future-of-civil-partnership-in-scotland/>

2021 Census: Outputs Strategy Consultation for Northern Ireland (closing date 9 January 2019)

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/dfp/2021-census-outputs-strategy-consultation-for-northern-ireland-document.pdf>

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