

# Political Affairs Digest

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

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Oral Answers

#### Appointment of Sir Roger Scruton

**Andrew Gwynne (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government if he will make a statement on the appointment of Sir Roger Scruton as the chair of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission. ...

When was the Secretary of State made aware of Sir Roger's links to far-right organisations, and his propagation of their antisemitic conspiracy theories? Was he aware that his new chair spoke out against the disbanding of Vlaams Blok by Belgian courts after it was found to have incited racial discrimination, dismissing it as a conspiracy by the "liberal establishment"? Is that acceptable, in the Secretary of State's view?

When was the Secretary of State made aware that Sir Roger heaped praise on Hungary's Viktor Orbán at the height of his truly hateful, state-orchestrated, antisemitic campaign against George Soros, and that he stated in a lecture in Hungary that Jewish intelligentsia "form part of the...Soros empire"?

We also know from reports in the *Huffington Post* today that Sir Roger Scruton spoke favourably of the National Front, calling it an "egalitarian" movement. Is this acceptable in the Secretary of State's eyes? ...

**James Brokenshire:** I have to say that it saddens me that someone who has done so much to champion freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of thought should be subject to the kind of misinformed, ill-judged and very personal attacks that we have seen over the last few days, some of which, sadly, the hon. Gentleman has just repeated. ...

Sir Roger Scruton is a leading expert on aesthetics, who was asked to take on an unpaid role as chair of a commission looking into beauty in the built environment. He is one of the most qualified people in this particular field, so I am pleased that he has accepted that role. As a public intellectual of renown and author of over 50 books, as well as countless articles and public lectures, Sir Roger is engaged in a variety of topics, often expressing—yes—strong and controversial views.

**Andrew Gwynne:** Racist.

**James Brokenshire:** I am not going to repeat the word that the hon. Gentleman used and read it into the record, but I think he should consider his terms. As Sir Roger has made very clear, he has been offended and hurt by suggestions that he is in any way antisemitic or Islamophobic. Most of what has been reported is highly selected, taken completely out of context and distorted to paint an

inaccurate picture. I do not have to agree with Sir Roger to acknowledge this, nor do I have to agree with his views on a number of different issues. However, we live in a free society where people can hold different opinions. I am proud that we do still live in a society where that remains possible. ...

I continue to believe that Sir Roger is the right person to lead this important work. ...

**Chi Onwurah (Labour):** Mr Speaker, you will not be surprised to hear that I disagree profoundly with many of the views of Sir Roger Scruton, which seem to be designed to bring the bigotry of the 19th century into the 21st. The Secretary of State implied that Sir Roger Scruton has been consistently taken out of context. Does he think that for a professional and public intellectual, as he describes him, to be so generally misrepresented shows a lack of professionalism and expertise, or does he think that offering Sir Roger Scruton a platform on the built environment of the communities of our country is in some way not connected with his views on race, multiculturalism, homophobia, sexual orientation and Islamophobia?

**James Brokenshire:** ... We live in a world where people communicate in 140 characters. We are talking about someone who delivers long lectures and has written extensively in many different books and some controversial articles. It is important to see that context. Sir Roger has accepted in the past that he has got it wrong—for example, he acknowledged in 2010 that he had changed his position on homophobia and was wrong. ...

**Edward Leigh (Conservative):** Is not the only truly illiberal thing to use student union smear tactics to deliberately attack a distinguished philosopher who has written hundreds of thousands of words and do what the Opposition spokesman has done today, which is to take one sentence and then claim that the philosopher is antisemitic? We should read the rest of the sentence, in which this philosopher says: “People in these networks include many who are rightly suspicious of nationalism, regard nationalism as the major cause of the tragedy of Central Europe”. ...

**Clive Efford (Labour):** This is not about freedom of speech; it is about whether someone is suitable to be appointed to public office who holds extreme views. There is a difference between dealing with controversial issues and expressing specific views on issues such as Islamophobia, antisemitism and racism in general, and links with right-wing organisations. ...

**James Gray (Conservative):** ... he is one of the most compassionate and even-handed men that I have ever met. He is my constituent and a good friend ... He is nothing like an antisemite, nor an Islamophobe. Nothing could be further from the truth, and it is an outrage to describe him as such. ...

**James Brokenshire:** Sir Roger is a leading philosopher, and his extensive work clearly provokes responses and debate, as it is intended to do. However, my focus is on the core skills that he brings to his work on beauty in the built environment, which is why he is so well placed to do this work. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-11-12/debates/0D489462-AA34-46B8-B30A-4A3ED4369039/AppointmentOfSirRogerScruton>

## Crown Prosecution Service

### Trio guilty of membership of banned British neo-Nazi group

Three people including a couple have ... been found guilty of being members of National Action, a proscribed group that glorifies Hitler and the Third Reich.

The group was banned by the Home Office in December 2016.

Adam Thomas, 22, and Claudia Patatas, 38, from Banbury were convicted alongside Daniel Bogunovic, 27, following a four week trial at Birmingham Crown Court. Thomas

was also found guilty of having a terrorist manual on his laptop that gave advice on homemade explosives including a “soft drink can bomb”.

Three others pleaded guilty to being members of the banned organisation before the trial began on 8 October. Darren Fletcher, 28, Nathan Pryke, 27, and Joel Wilmore, 24, admitted the offence under the Terrorism Act. Wilmore also pleaded guilty to possessing a terrorist manual about how to make Molotov cocktails.

Deb Walsh from the CPS said: “After National Action was banned it went underground and changed its name but it did not disappear.

“These members continued to believe in its racist neo-Nazi worldview, remained in contact on encrypted messaging apps, and organised meetings to keep the group going.

“But they left a vast trail of incriminating evidence which led to three of them pleading guilty and the others being convicted by the jury today.”

The prosecution’s case was built around texts and images they shared on messaging apps before the ban in December 2016 and until September 2017. This demonstrated that even after National Action was proscribed they continued to operate as devoted members of the organisation but gave it different titles including “Triple K Mafia” – a reference to the Ku Klux Klan in the US.

The messages praised the Nazis, Hitler, the “final solution” and images included that of men dressed in paramilitary style clothes holding up or surrounded by National Action banners. They also arranged meetings including one in a pub in Sutton Coldfield in April 2017 attended by Pryke, Bogunovic, Fletcher, and Patatas.

Images were also found on Patatas’s laptop of Adam Thomas in Ku Klux Klan robes holding a machete taken at their home in Banbury. She also had a photo on her mobile of Thomas, Fletcher and others giving a Nazi salute under a crucifix outside Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral. When Bogunovic’s house in Leicester was searched the police found a Nazi flag in his bedroom along with a large number of National Action stickers. He also had a National Action strategy manual on a memory stick.

All six will be sentenced on Friday 14 December. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/trio-guilty-membership-banned-british-neo-nazi-group>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### **Brazil: Israel**

**Lyn Brown (Labour)** [187331] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the plans of the President-Elect of Brazil to move that country's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on the UK foreign policy objective of achieving a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians.

**Alistair Burt:** We assess that moving the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem before a final status agreement would not help peace in the region. Our position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-02/187331/>

#### **Palestinians: Politics and Government**

**Joan Ryan (Labour)** [188701] To ask the Secretary of State for International

Development, with reference to her Department's Memorandum of Understanding with the Palestinian Authority (PA), what assessment she has made of President Abbas's remarks to the Palestinian Central Council on 28/10/18 that the salaries of our martyrs, prisoners, and wounded are a red line and the martyrs and their families are sacred. We will continue to pay to the wounded and the prisoners. Even if we have one plaster left, it will be for them, and not for the living.

**Alistair Burt:** Whilst prisoners and their families have a right to support in line with their social needs as they would in the UK, we want the system to be more transparent, affordable and needs based to make sure the payments cover only prisoners' and their families' needs. We continue to use our strong partnership with the Palestinian Authority (PA) to press for reform of the prisoner payment system.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-06/188701/>

## Foreign and Commonwealth Office

**Updated Foreign travel advice: Israel**

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

**Updated Foreign travel advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories**

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

## United Nations

**Delegates Call for Predictable, Sustained Financing of Palestine Refugee Agency as Fourth Committee Concludes General Debate on Its Work**

... Mounzer Mounzer (Syria), emphasizing that the question of Palestine refugees is an international political, legal and moral responsibility, said the inability of the United Nations to enforce resolution 194 (1948) has emboldened Israel to continue its displacement policy. Noting that his country is hosting Palestine refugees as “dear brothers and sisters” pending their return home, he said they are suffering in Syria because of attacks by armed terrorist groups that have infiltrated their camps, causing a humanitarian crisis until the Syrian military liberated them. ...

Sima Sami I. Bahous (Jordan) recalled that UNRWA was formed after the 1948 Nakba [the 1948 Palestinian exodus], reflecting the General Assembly's desire to protect Palestine refugees. Today, many of those refugees are denied their right to prosper and to return to their villages, she said. Noting that her country hosts the largest number of Palestine refugees, she said Jordan mobilizes efforts to support UNRWA so that it can carry out its mandate. ... she warned that undermining UNRWA could deepen the frustrations of refugees and cause young people to fall prey to extremism. ...

Outlining Jordan's support for Palestine refugees, she said that the Government granted them nationality to allow them to live in dignity. However, that action should not affect their inalienable right to return to their own land ...

Bernardito Cleopas Auza, Permanent Observer for the Holy See, said ... It is concerning that some would like to limit refugee status to those who fled in 1948, excluding their descendants through the paternal line, he noted, emphasizing that such a restrictive understanding will deprive the descendants, who remain stateless, of any claim to support. The international community has a grave responsibility to facilitate the settlement of the millions of refugees concerned, he said, reaffirming the Holy See's unwavering support for a two-State solution as the only viable manner by which to address the extended statelessness of Palestinians. ...

Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, ... [emphasised] the exclusively humanitarian nature of the Agency's work, he said UNRWA is not part of the political discussion but is focused on helping human beings in severe circumstances. ...

The suggestion that Palestine refugees are unique under international law as the only group enjoying that status as descendants is a misrepresentation, he continued, stressing that under international law, the children of refugees and their descendants are also refugees until a durable solution to their situation is found. ...

He went on to underline that Palestine refugees are not "so-called" refugees, pointing out that even if UNRWA no longer exists, the refugees will still exist under international law, and some other entity will have to take care of their needs. ...

The representative of Israel, speaking in exercise of the right of reply, expressed appreciation for the humanitarian assistance extended by UNRWA to Palestinians. He went on to outline the history of Israel's statehood and of the wars fought between that country and its Arab neighbours, emphasizing the need to reconsider the "ritual" and traditional blaming of Israel for the conflict. Moreover, the approach to the Palestine refugee problem must change, he said, observing that the right of return is presented as the only solution to the problem. Other organizations, like UNHCR, are dedicated to alleviating the suffering of refugees by offering other solutions, he said describing the claim to a right of return as a mistake that plays into the hands of those who wish to perpetuate the conflict. ...

Noting that decisions in the General Assembly are made by a majority, he said such democracy is misleading because the decisions taken do not support peace in the Middle East. In that context, he said General Assembly resolution 194 (III) is not legally binding and does not give Palestine refugees the right of return. ... Reiterating that the right of return does not exist under international law, he said repatriation is a policy preference but does not constitute a right. ... He called upon Palestinians to understand that the refugee problem cannot be solved by the right of return, stressing: "There can be no return to Israel."

An observer for the State of Palestine, also speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said ... that Palestinians were driven from their homes in 1947-8, she said they were either forcibly expelled or fled in fear of the killings and destruction perpetrated by Jewish militias. Their uprooting was deliberate, as was the prevention of their return, she said, emphasizing that Palestinians should have been able to return to their homes and lands after the hostilities ceased. However, Israel wanted the land without its people, she added, noting that it is a well-known fact. "This is ethnic cleansing," she emphasized, noting that it is fully documented by Israeli historians. ...

The representative of Israel said the Palestinians have double-track demands — on statehood and the right of return. While Israel accepts a two-State solution, it cannot agree to the right of return, he emphasized. The obstacle to peace lies in the disagreement among Palestinian leadership, he said, calling upon Palestinians to speak in one voice, with one leader, to negotiate peace. The right of return would mean the cessation of Israel, he added.

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gaspd685.doc.htm>

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## **Relevant Legislation**

\*\* new or updated today

### **UK Parliament**

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

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

## **Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill**

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

## **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>

Health and Sport Committee: Stage 1 evidence session

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11764&i=106496#ScotParlOR>

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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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