

Political Affairs Digest

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

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House of Lords Written Answer

Religion: Education

Baroness Whitaker (Labour) [HL11182] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report by the Commission on Religious Education, Religion and Worldviews: the way forward. A national plan for RE, published in September; and whether they intend to provide a response to that report.

Lord Agnew of Oulton: Religious education helps to develop children's knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries, and to foster understanding among different faiths and cultures – it is also compulsory for all age groups in state-funded schools.

The report by the Commission for Religious Education highlights the challenges faced in teaching religious education and sets out a number of recommendations on how the teaching and status of religious education in England could be improved.

The department is reviewing these recommendations and will respond to them soon.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-10-31/HL11182/>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Faith Minister calls on religious communities to bridge divides

Faith Minister, Lord Bourne ... urged people and faith groups across the country to reach out to one another and build local networks to support their communities and to bridge divides and extend understanding.

The call came as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published a new report to mark Inter Faith Week, championing the role faith groups play in their communities and highlighting the valuable inter faith work taking place around the country. ...

Minister for Faith Lord Bourne said: ... "As we mark Inter Faith Week, there is no better time to celebrate faith groups around the country who are making a profound impact on

their communities, and to encourage people of all faiths to support and lead inter faith activity in their area.

The report details how inter faith networks can encourage social mixing and play a key role in building strong, resilient communities. Reflecting on this evidence, Lord Bourne issued a call for individuals and religious institutions around the country to:

- recognise the valuable contribution of faith and belief institutions
- remain open to understanding those of other faiths and beliefs within your community
- reach and establish partnerships with other organisations
- encourage your faith institutions to join a local interfaith network
- establish interfaith networks in those areas where they don't already exist

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/faith-minister-calls-on-religious-communities-to-bridge-divides>

Belief in communities: bridging the divide

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/756211/Faith_in_Communities_-_Bridging_the_Divide.pdf

Scottish Government

Modernising Hate Crime law

... 'One Scotland: Hate Has No Home Here' follows on from Lord Bracadale's review of existing hate crime legislation in Scotland which included recommendations that additional statutory aggravations should be created for age and gender.

The consultation calls for views on a number of issues including how best to tackle gender based prejudice and misogyny. The issue of sectarianism will also be considered with the consultation seeking views on how this could be tackled through law based on the findings of the Working Group on Defining Sectarianism in Scots Law.

The public responses will inform the development of a hate crime bill which will be laid before Holyrood later in this session of Parliament.

Cabinet Secretary for Justice Humza Yousaf ... said: "Hate crime and prejudice are completely unacceptable and we are absolutely committed to tackling them. ...

"We know that legislation in itself is not enough to build the inclusive Scotland we want and aspire to, but having robust law in place is vital so that it is clear to all that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable in society."

Cabinet Secretary for Communities Aileen Campbell ... said: "Hate crime and prejudice have a hugely damaging effect on victims, their families and communities and there is absolutely no place for it in Scotland. ...

"We are absolutely committed to modernising our hate crime legislation and I look forward to considering all responses to our consultation, I am confident that together we can build a stronger, more connected Scotland."

The Lord Advocate, James Wolffe, QC ... said: "Crime motivated by hatred is not only a wrong against the individual, but it is an affront to our collective values as a community, creating division and fear.

"This is why we treat hate crime so seriously and why, as Scotland's independent public prosecution service, the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, will continue to do so.

"We are committed to tackling hate crime." ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.scot/news/modernising-hate-crime-law/>

Tackling Hate Crime

Dawn Bowden (Labour) [OAQ52912] Will the Leader of House provide an update on Welsh Government action to tackle hate crime?

Julie James: We are building on our tackling hate crime programme and expanding our community cohesion work across Wales to mitigate any rise in hate crime. Our hate crime criminal justice board is an effective forum, bringing together key partners to co-ordinate our work in this area.

Dawn Bowden: ... First of all, can I thank you and what the Welsh Government have been doing on this important issue? The scale of the programme was recently highlighted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission report that we debated last week, and it's an important question for all Assembly Members to consider, and even more for all of us to acknowledge that the language that we choose to use in the Senedd shapes the messages that we send to the people of Wales. So, would you agree with me that what we say and what we do in this place plays an important part in encouraging an atmosphere that can help to reduce the current levels of hate crime in Wales?

Julie James: I completely agree with Dawn Bowden when she raises this very important point. Yesterday, I had the privilege of addressing the multi-faith forum meeting over in the Pierhead, and they were about to do a walk through all of the various communities of Cardiff. Unfortunately, due to Plenary commitments, I couldn't join them, but that was all about stressing the need for individual responsibility, individual action—the importance of each individual's actions in the sum of the whole in terms of our culture, and I really endorse that absolutely.

Here in Wales, we want as leaders to represent all of the communities that we represent fairly, openly, with honesty and respect, because all of our communities deserve that. And it is a fundamental point in that that the way we talk about each other and to each other very much matters in the ethos that we set here in Wales.

Mohammad Asghar (Conservative): Leader of the house, incidents of anti-Semitism have been on the rise across the United Kingdom. In the first six months of this year, 727 anti-Semitic incidents were recorded by the Community Security Trust. It has been reported by the *Jewish Chronicle* that one of your Welsh colleagues questioned whether anti-Semitic hate crime was real, and whether the threat is all in their own head. Leader of the house, will you take this opportunity to state clearly that anti-Semitism is a hate crime, and will you join me in condemning these comments, which totally fail to recognise the threat faced by our communities, especially Jewish communities in Wales?

Julie James: Yes. On 17 October, the First Minister issued a written statement to confirm that in adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of anti-Semitism in May of last year, we included the 11 examples from the outset in full and without qualification. So, I am very happy to make it absolutely clear that anti-Semitism in any form will not be tolerated here in Wales—or any other form of racist language, action or attitudes. The Welsh Government is committed to encouraging victims of anti-Semitism to report it. We are working hard with our partners to protect and support victims of anti-Semitic abuse and violence and to hold perpetrators to account. We are determined to ensure that Wales continues to be a friendly and tolerant place in which to live, study and work, a country where anti-Semitism has no place in our society—or any other form of racist or intolerant language or abuse.

Caroline Jones (Independent): Leader of the house, I welcome the actions you are taking to tackle hate crime. However, this is a growing issue, particularly online. Many young people are subjected to a constant barrage of hate, hate speech and online bullying, from which there is no escape. Leader of the house, will you outline how you and the Cabinet Secretary for Education, in conjunction with the UK Government, are

working with the technology sector to stop the spread of online hate speech and cyber bullying in Wales?

Julie James: Yes, it's a very important point that the Member raises. Obviously, social media is a growing part of our culture and language, and we ought to have the same standards of conduct and respect and tolerance and inclusion for each other in social media as we do everywhere else. It's particularly unfortunate that people feel that they can be anonymous there, and there's a piece of work for all of us, I think, to take forward in developing rules as the twenty-first century unfolds around anonymity in these sorts of forums. The Welsh Government provided £5,000 again this year to each of the four Welsh forces and Victim Support to actively support National Hate Crime Awareness Week in October and to raise awareness of hate crime throughout the year, and that includes in the digital space. I also work very closely with the Cabinet Secretary for Education in supporting be safe on the internet week, which was only very recently and in supporting our digital pioneers and young internet cadets right throughout Wales in both recognising bullying for what it is, whether it's online or not online, and actually in learning the skills and techniques to ensure that they and their colleagues are safe and that they learn how to look out for each other both in the physical space and in cyberspace.

<http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5364#C136783>

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Israel

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Alistair Burt: I condemn Hamas rocket fire, and am deeply concerned by civilian casualties. Civilians in Israel and Gaza must be protected. Everyone must step back from the brink and avoid further escalation. UK fully supports Egypt/UN efforts to calm situation & find lasting solution to Gaza.

<https://twitter.com/AlistairBurtUK/status/1062295978303201280>

United Nations

Gaza: deadly violence continues to escalate, top UN officials work to restore calm

As violence in the Gaza Strip is once again flaring up reportedly following a raid and bombings by Israeli forces and multiple rocket launches from inside the Palestinian enclave, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, said on Tuesday that he was following developments closely, while his Special Coordinator for the region, Nickolay Mladenov, works with all sides to try and restore calm.

Urging all parties to “exercise maximum restraint,” Mr. Guterres noted that efforts to implement a ceasefire are ongoing in close collaboration with the Egyptian authorities, the main interlocutor between the Israeli Government and the Hamas extremist group, which has controlled Gaza since 2006.

According to media reports, the latest violence erupted on Sunday evening when an Israeli special forces operation was exposed by troops several miles into the Strip that resulted in the death of at least six Palestinians.

The Hamas forces reportedly responded with hundreds of rocket launches across the border, and Israeli forces continued the escalation by bombing several sites, including the Hamas-run television station Al-Aqsa TV.

A Palestinian from the occupied West Bank working in the southern Israeli city of

Ashkelon was also reportedly killed by rocket fire.

It was also reported that the group controlling the Gaza Strip has pledged to step up rockets attacks "if Israel continued its aggression", further derailing the painstaking truce-efforts that have been on-going for months now, led by the UN and Egypt. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/11/1025581>

Special Committee Chair Cites Discrimination, Excessive Force, Collective Punishment as Fourth Committee Tackles Israeli Practices in Arab Lands

... Satya Rodrigo (Sri Lanka), Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, presented that panel's report (document A/73/420), noting that, as in previous years, the Government of Israel did not respond to the Special Committee's request for access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory or the occupied Syrian Golan. ... the report provides updates on several issues of concern, including the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements on occupied lands; the exploitation of natural resources; the blockade and closure of Gaza; the absence of accountability; the detention of children and use of administrative detention; and the hostility to human rights organizations in the occupied territories.

Concerning settlement expansion, he said the demolition of Palestinian homes and destruction of their private property by Israeli security forces was one of the most frequently cited issues of concern in the Special Committee's meetings in 2018. ...

... he expressed particular concern about excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against demonstrations that began in March 2018 near the fence between Gaza and Israel. ... Also concerning is Israel's tightening of restrictions on imports into Gaza in response to the launching of burning kites from the enclave into Israel, further exacerbating the electricity crisis and threatening the delivery of life-saving services. ...

Also of serious concern to the Special Committee is the use of arbitrary administrative detention of Palestinians, often on the basis of secret information to which the detainee is granted neither access to nor the opportunity to challenge it ...

Francesco Motta, Director for Asia-Pacific, Middle East and North Africa in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), delivered a statement on behalf of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, and introduced the following reports of the Secretary-General: Applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories (document A/73/364); the occupied Syrian Golan (document A/73/357); and Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan (document A/73/410).

He noted that the latter report provides information on an increase in settlement planning but a decrease in the number of tenders and construction starts. It focuses on the impact of settlements on the Jordan Valley and on the human rights of Palestinians living there, including factors contributing to the coercive environment around settlements. ...

Introducing the report of the Secretary-General on Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (document A/73/420), he said it highlights several key ongoing human rights violations in Gaza, examining the rights to life and security in light of recent demonstrations there. The report notes that Israeli forces, acting in a law-enforcement capacity, have used lethal force on numerous occasions when the threat posed did not amount to a danger to life or serious injury. ...

The representative of Israel said his delegation rejects the mandate of the Special Committee because it serves only one side of the story and undermines Israel's right to defend itself. He expressed sadness that while Israel has the best human rights record in the Middle East, especially when compared with Hamas or neighbouring countries, it is targeted every year. Recalling the recent missile attacks launched against Israel from

Gaza, he emphasized that his country operates with great restraint, focusing on terrorist activities while trying to minimize collateral damage. Hopefully, someday, this Committee will turn its focus from Israel and investigate other abhorrent practices in the Middle East ...

The observer for the State of Palestine expressed gratitude for the Special Committee's efforts to carry out its mandate despite the lack of cooperation from Israel. Among the report's most troubling findings are the human rights violations against Palestinian children, including their targeting for lethal force, arrest and imprisonment, she said, while asking for further elaboration on interactions between the United Nations and Israel aimed at preventing such violations of international humanitarian law.

Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, Observer for the State of Palestine, urged immediate collective action based on the report's recommendations to address the human rights violations endured by the Palestinian people. The absence of accountability measures makes it apparent that Israel will persist with impunity, acting as a State above the law and destroying all chances for peace ...

The ferocity of Israel's aggression against unarmed civilians peacefully protesting in Gaza is a further reflection of that country's absolute disregard for Palestinian life, she continued. The protection crisis under Israeli occupation is dramatic and constant, she said, calling upon the international community to meet its commitments to ensure the safety and well-being of Palestinians. ...

She went on to state that Israel pursues legislative schemes aimed at reinforcing its illegal expansionist agenda, including such racist legislation as the "Jewish Nation-State" bill passed earlier in 2018. She called upon the international community to reject Israel's peddling of the cynical discourse that it is unfairly singled out. ...

Pierre-Christophe Chatzisavas, European Union delegation, expressed deep concern about the situation in Gaza, noting that 2 million people there struggle for sufficient access to basic services, including water and electricity. As living conditions worsen, protests and violence have intensified and expanded, exacerbating an already volatile situation in and around the enclave. ... While acknowledging Israel's right to self-defence, the European Union expects the Israeli authorities to respect the principles of necessity and proportionality in its use of force, he emphasized. ...

The representative of Israel, speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said Arabs and Muslims have hijacked the United Nations across the board, adding that the hatred of Jews is greatest in Arab countries. The presence of Jews as a community in the Middle East is "hated to death", he reiterated. Describing Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East, where freedom of the press and movement exist, he said it has brought innovations to the world. An inherent hatred towards Jews and Israel is broadcast in Arab countries, he said, adding that people from those countries flee to Europe, taking terrible notions of Jews and causing an increase in anti-Semitism there too. Palestinians in the Arab world launched a war against Jews and that notion constitutes the main obstacle to peace, he said, adding that if Palestinians accept the Jewish State and wish to live in peace with it, they will find a partner in Israel.

He went on to state that if Israel puts down its weapons, it will cease to exist, whereas if Palestinians do so, there will be peace. Citing the rift between Palestinians, he asked how Israel can make peace with someone who cannot deliver. Even the peaceful Palestinian voice is paying salaries to terrorists and their families, he said, adding that the more Jews are assassinated by those terrorists, the more remuneration they receive. Describing "Occupied Palestinian Territories" as a political term, he stressed that there is no Palestinian State, calling for the issue to be discussed in a real peace process. Recalling that there was no blockade of Gaza before Hamas took over, he emphasized that the closure is a protective measure. "We will protect ourselves no matter what the cost is." Calling upon Palestinians to accept the Jewish presence, he urged them to adopt a single voice for peace.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gasped686.doc.htm>

Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/73/420)

<http://undocs.org/A/73/420>

Applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories (A/73/364)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/73/364>

The occupied Syrian Golan (A/73/357)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/73/357>

Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan (A/73/410)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/73/410>

Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/73/420)

<https://undocs.org/en/A/73/420>

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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>

**** Draft guidance to challenge bullying in schools** [Wales only] (closing date 15 February 2019)

<https://beta.gov.wales/draft-guidance-challenge-bullying-schools>

**** One Scotland: Hate Has No Home Here** (closing date 24 February 2019)

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/one-scotland-hate-home-here-consultation-hate-crime-amending-current-scottish-hate-crime-legislation/>

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