

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Religious Education

col 152GC **Lord Alderdice (Liberal Democrat):** 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*, published in September; and whether they intend to publish any response.

col 153GC The report is ... arguably, it is the most substantial piece of work on the issue of religious education in our country since the 1970s. ...

If we think about the question of what religious education is about, it is not the old view of religious instruction. We have clearly got beyond the point ... where it is simply education in one religious perspective. In our country, it is absolutely clear that we must take a wider perspective into consideration. ...

... religion is about how we understand and engage with meaning and that which transcends any particular subject or element of our lives, nation or state. It is how we understand our whole way of being in the world. That does not depend on being a member of any particular religious family. What is crucial in education is the drawing together, the giving to young people, of opportunity, encouragement and education to understand meaning, purpose and their engagement with the universe in which we live. ...

col 154GC When the Minister responds by saying that it is about their getting knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries and therefore fostering mutual respect and tolerance, that is, for me, the expression of a generation for whom religious education was a failure, so that at the highest levels of the country, people fundamentally do not understand what religion is about and its role in the human condition.

That is not surprising, because we now find that in 2016 a large percentage of schools—33%—offered no RE at all at key stage 4, up from 22% the year before. Those schools are in breach of the law, yet the Government seem to show no interest or concern about it. ...

We should be asking why people have lost a sense of passion about this. ...

When it comes to the idea that religion is about conveying the culture of our country, the whole point of the Christian faith that I hold is that it is not nationalistic, it goes beyond that and says, "No, it is not just about this country". ... To say such things tells me that there is a failure of religious education not just in this generation but for the past two or

three generations ...

col 155GC Why is that important? It is because when we deal with other people in other places or with people in our society for whom this is very important, leading, thoughtful, decision-making people do not understand what they are dealing with. They make the wrong decisions when it comes to dealing with fundamentalism, terrorism and the politics of other countries, because, as the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury said in a debate on Friday, a majority of people in this country may not have religious perspectives, but if you look globally, it is quite the opposite and is a growing phenomenon in the world. We must therefore understand that we must take it seriously. ...

Lord Stone of Blackheath (Labour): ... My secular schooling, in Cardiff, was traumatic and upsetting. I was asked to leave school at the age of 16 thinking that I was stupid. My Jewish evening classes, which I attended after school, were so narrow and strict, concentrating on ritual and practice, that I was made to think that I could not be spiritual. ...

col 156GC Rabbi David Geffen ... saw that teachers were not trained to introduce into their schools concepts of compassion, empathy, equality, respect and love, and he has created a wonderful system of training teachers to teach these values. ... He says, as suggested in this report, that genuine universal religious education is the study of unity and oneness. ...

People might not know that in Judaism the written word for God, which cannot be spoken, consists of four letters, which ... must not be pronounced. It is referred to in prayer only as “the Lord” or “the Name”. In fact, it is not a word; it is the root of the verb “to be”. ... This is the energy that unites, permeates and gives life to all beings for all time. ... If children of all faiths and none were helped to experience this, it would help them to progress in whatever activity they find themselves undertaking in life.

I am also delighted that Jeffrey Leader, director of Pikuach, the government-accredited inspection service for Jewish schools, is set on ensuring that all Jewish schools in this country, whatever their strand of Judaism, teach not just the confining rules and regulations, history and scriptures but, as Rabbi Geffen suggests, the values of unity, spirituality and oneness that it advocates. ...

col 157GC **Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):** ... Unpalatable as it may be to some, around 84% of the world’s population has religious beliefs. There are 2.4 billion Christians, around 30% of the global population, and as the noble Lord, Lord Alderdice, told us earlier, that number has been increasing. Lyse Doucet, the BBC’s courageous foreign affairs correspondent, was right to say that if you want to understand the world you have to understand religion. The ultimate paradox would be to counter a decline in religious literacy by teaching less religion. RE is not about enforcing a belief in God: it is about respecting and taking seriously those who do. This cannot be elided into social sciences, reduced to a purely human or theoretical phenomenon, or a methodologically agnostic, neutral approach to religion. ...

col 158GC Religious literacy and understanding of faith and no faith, the honouring of difference, the determination to understand one another and to reconsider bigotry, prejudice and caricatures, must surely be at the heart of how we form tomorrow’s citizens. ...

... I much prefer the use of a syllabus agreed locally between faith communities, teachers and local authorities. This is about ensuring that children will be taught religious knowledge in terms of how religions understand themselves, not as how the non-religious would wish them to understand themselves. The report’s proposed abolition of the LAS would mean that the guaranteed contribution to and ownership of local RE by local faith leaders would end. A place at the table, with proper accountability, is a far better approach than telling faith communities that they are no longer welcome. ...

Here are three responses to the report that we should hear this evening with some concern. The Board of Deputies of British Jews calls it “fundamentally flawed”, saying

that it, “might be seen as an attempt by those hostile to faith to push their agenda of undermining rigour in religious education at a time when faith literacy could not be more important”.

The Board of Deputies says that recommendations 1 to 4 are profoundly contentious and dismantle an important part of the Church-state settlement from 1944, 1988 and 1996.

col 159GC The Catholic Education Service agrees and argues that the quality of religious education is not enhanced or improved by teaching less religion. It says, “the scope of the subject”, will become “so wide” and potentially “nondescript” that it would, “lose all academic value and integrity”, and potentially depress religious literacy and understanding at a time when persecution of religious freedom has increased globally.

The Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education also expresses disappointment. It says, “the report paints an overwhelmingly negative picture of the current state of RE”. ...

The Bishop of Chichester: ... There may be many causes for the decline in the delivery of good-quality teaching in RE, but one of them will undoubtedly be the exclusion of the subject from the EBacc and a consequent decline in the number of qualified RE teachers in schools. ...

I hope the Minister presses the point with Ofsted so that a school could not be judged outstanding if it were not able to demonstrate excellence in religion and worldviews—RE, if you wish to call it that—and the arts, especially music. ...

col 160GC In today’s pluralist society, we need teachers who will challenge cultural and religious stereotypes from a position of understanding and respect. In the case of religions that have an inherited and shared cultic practice, an identifiable canon of foundational texts and an organised pattern of leadership, it will be important to ensure that secure subject knowledge also includes the ability to explore a faith system’s world view through the practices that define and sustain it. In this respect, I hope that any national body that is responsible for developing coherent programmes of study would be required to consult religious and cultural organisations, particularly those whose practice, texts and organisation are the material for study in our schools. ...

col 161GC **Lord Taverne (Liberal Democrat):** ... Teaching should teach us about beliefs—to understand them and be tolerant towards other beliefs, when they too preach tolerance—but in my view schools should not teach beliefs. They should teach children to think and question and if that leads them to adopt a religion or confirm their parents’ religious views, as they mostly do, that is well and good. But it should not treat children as Catholic, Protestant, Muslim or Jewish any more than we would treat them as Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat children. ... Children should have a chance to choose their beliefs for themselves. Religion should be taught in the context of science. ...

col 162GC **Baroness Bakewell (Labour):** ... The Secretary of State said that religious education is useful because it teaches respect and tolerance. Religion is far more important than that. It is a global crisis. It is the basis of many of our wars and the cause of a great deal of persecution ...

col 163GC **Lord Addington (Liberal Democrat):** ... The first step towards a more civil and co-operative society is knowing what other people think and how they think. It is deciding that another person is well intentioned or it is thinking that they are wrong most of the time as opposed to evil, whether because of religion, politics or anything else. ...

We do not need to reinforce faith. Jedi got on to the census. To the English, religion is a movable feast that does not go down certain tram-lines. It does not even go on branch lines; it is hiking across hills somewhere. Then we have groups that want to acquire an identity. Those of Islamic faith seem to defend themselves and their identity by hanging on to aspects of religion. We have to try to make these people see each other as the norm and not as alien. If you are alien, we can disagree with you and persecute you because you are not us. We are right and, if you are not us, you must be wrong. ...

col 164GC **Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Labour):** ... Religious education is a vital academic subject, providing important knowledge as well as the tools to develop critical

thinking and ask informed questions. ...

The commission's report ... has been widely welcomed, most notably by the Church of England, the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education, the National Association of Head Teachers and Humanists UK. We share the view of the National Education Union that it should form the start of a much-needed conversation about the place of religious education in our schools. ...

I note from their responses to the report that the Catholic Education Service and the Board of Deputies of British Jews—bodies that I respect—oppose the addition of humanism and other non-religious perspectives to religious education. Both organisations suggest that the incorporation of world views into the syllabus would somehow diminish religious education. ... I contend that, with the number of pupils taking religious studies at A-level having fallen by 22% since 2017, and with 70% of people aged 18 to 24 identifying as having no religion, the inclusion of a diverse range of world views would make religious education better equipped to remain relevant to young people growing up in 21st-century Britain, both those with religion and those without. ...

col 165GC The commission also recommends that for faith schools, a requirement should be introduced to provide religion and world views within the national entitlement. This would be provided in addition to any faith-based education and, again, is not supported by either the Catholic Education Service or the Board of Deputies of British Jews—I think I can understand why. Labour is minded to support that recommendation but, before doing so, we intend to meet both those organisations and those representing other faiths to understand why they believe that by teaching pupils at their schools about world views, they would undermine the teaching that they currently offer. Surely, those religions are more than robust enough to withstand their adherents receiving a broader understanding of the philosophy that underpins the beliefs of others. ...

col 166GC This is not ... about telling faith communities that they are no longer welcome. That is a mischaracterisation of those who advocate broadening and deepening the curriculum through critical thought and reasoning. ...

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education (Lord Agnew of Oulton): ... We have decided that now is not the time to implement the commission's ambitious recommendations radically to reform religious education. However, the Government agree that good-quality religious education can develop children's knowledge of the values and traditions of Britain and other countries. It can foster understanding among different faiths and cultures. It is an essential part of a school's legal duty to promote young people's spiritual, moral and cultural development. ...

Schools and colleges have a duty actively to promote fundamental British values as part of the duty to prevent people becoming drawn into terrorism. These shared values—democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and respect and tolerance for those of other faiths and beliefs—unite us and underpin our society. The religious landscape of this country forms part of those principles ...

According to the school workforce statistics, 3.3% of all teaching hours in state-funded secondary schools in 2017 were spent teaching religious education. This compares with a figure of 3.2% in 2010, so it has remained broadly stable over that period. ...

col 167GC However, one of the commission's most concerning statements was that it had found a number of maintained schools and academies either no longer teaching RE or no longer teaching it as a dedicated subject. On that point, I would like to be very clear: RE is not optional. Schools not teaching it are acting unlawfully or are in breach of their academy funding agreements. We will take action if this is found to be the case. ...

The commission's report suggests that existentialism and Confucianism are examples of suitable non-religious world views as they each make ontological and epistemological claims. This illustrates how defining world views and then deciding those worthy of study is complex. There is a risk that religious education is diluted in an attempt to embrace many other strands of thinking. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, raises the responses of the

Catholic Education Service and the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Both have publicly expressed their concern about this. They are unlikely to be alone. ...

col 168GC The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chichester raises the importance of Ofsted assessments of religious education, and I agree with him that this is an important part of an inspection of a school. I will take back his suggestion that to achieve an outstanding grade, schools should provide good-quality religious education. ...

The report mentions that the right to withdraw from religious education has existed in our education system since 1870 and was reconfirmed in legislation in the 1944 and 1988 education Acts. The commission found that many schools are not clear on the scope of this right and how to handle applications for withdrawal. ... Since then the National Association of Head Teachers and the National Association of Teachers of RE have produced guidance for schools on this issue. The Government are comfortable with this guidance; my department will help to raise awareness of it. ...

col 169GC I thank the Commission on Religious Education for its well-considered report. Although it offers radical options for reform which at the moment we cannot consider implementing, we welcome the debate that it generates. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-12-17/debates/A497B8C8-9BE9-4975-95E3-91F4748A98AC/ReligiousEducation>

The report which is the subject of this debate can be read at

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

House of Commons Written Answer

Hate Crime

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [199928] To ask the Attorney General, what assessment he has made of trends in the number of cases of alleged hate crimes ending before going to court as a result of such complaints being withdrawn.

Robert Buckland: In 2017-18, the number of non-convictions due to complainant retraction was 188, down from 198 the previous year. This accounted for 1.3% of all completed hate crime prosecutions. The Crown Prosecution Service is working closely with criminal justice partners to ensure the support offered to complainants and witnesses in hate crime cases is tailored to meet their individual needs.

The majority of hate crime prosecutions (75.4%) result in a guilty plea from defendants, reducing the need for complainants and witnesses to give evidence in court. However, where live evidence is required, the CPS is committed to supporting them to give their best evidence. This includes consideration of whether they would benefit from special measures such as giving evidence behind a screen or via a video link.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-12-06/199928/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Animal Welfare Standards

Lord Trees (Crossbench): To ask Her Majesty's Government whether their recent trade deal to supply 50,000 lambs killed without stunning to Saudi Arabia is consistent with their commitment to maintain animal welfare standards after Brexit.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: My Lords, the Government encourage the highest standards of welfare at slaughter, and have been clear that they will not water down their high animal welfare standards in the furtherance of trade. The

agreement with Saudi Arabia was on the terms of the health certification for animal products and lifts a 20-year ban on lamb exports. It is not a trade deal per se. All slaughter of animals for export—whether stunned or non-stunned—must strictly comply with EU and UK rules on animal welfare.

Lord Trees: ... Will the Government undertake to halt further halal exports until our welfare and farming organisations, our regulatory authorities and, most importantly, the appropriate UK halal authorities, have reached agreement to follow procedures similar to the New Zealand model? Given that, our farmers could then export with confidence, and the international halal community could be reassured that it is getting meat that meets its requirements.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: ... The issues around this are very complex. The Government would prefer all animals to be stunned before slaughter, but derogations have existed for Muslim and Jewish communities since the 1930s. However, the Government are well aware of research into stunning techniques, in particular for cattle and sheep, which may be helpful in reducing the amount of non-stunned slaughter. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure that we have the highest standards of animal welfare, while ensuring freedom of religious expression.

Baroness Fookes (Conservative): My Lords, I have protested about the killing of any animal without pre-stunning for more years now than I care to remember, and I am not going to stop protesting now. May I ask my noble friend not to allow the departure of animals from this country without pre-stunning?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I hope that my noble friend will continue protesting, and I am sure that many other noble Lords will continue to do so ... European Council Regulation 1099/2009 protects the animals at the time of killing. However, the UK has stricter national rules through WATOK, the welfare of animals at time of killing regulations. These provide for the types of stunning that can be carried out, but also set out precisely what must happen if an animal is to be slaughtered without stunning. It is part of the slaughter process, but we slaughter 13.3 million sheep a year, and the vast majority are stunned before slaughter.

Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, the UK has moved a long way forward in ensuring that animals are stunned prior to slaughter, as has been indicated. Animal welfare is, rightly, an essential ingredient of our culture, both pre and post Brexit. It is therefore incomprehensible that the contract to supply 50,000 lamb carcasses to Saudi Arabia allows for their slaughter without pre-stunning. Other EU countries that allow non-stunned slaughter have measures in place to ensure that that meat is for the domestic market only. ...

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: My Lords, I would like to be clear that there is no contract for 50,000 sheep to go to Saudi Arabia. I am not entirely sure where that comes from. An export health certificate has been issued in the case of Saudi Arabia, but it has not been used, so not a single lamb has left the country, whether stunned or non-stunned. On the point the noble Baroness raised, we have our regulations within our nation, which allow both stunning and non-stunning within very strict parameters. It is for the benefit of our sheep farmers, mostly in the north of England, Wales and Scotland, that they are able to sell their sheep where they like, within the regulations.

Lord Rooker (Labour): Does the Minister not appreciate that there is no international body for certifying halal? That is why, in New Zealand, the halal authority agrees to pre-stunning. She cannot hide behind the EU, because the EU allows into Europe all the New Zealand lamb—and all of it that comes to the UK is halal, without exception. If the EU allows that in, we cannot then use the EU rules to stop our own people here deciding that we will have a halal authority which still gives the certification but allows for pre-stunning. That is the root cause of the problem: Defra should make sure that there is a halal body prepared to do that in this country, otherwise we simply would not allow the exports.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The noble Lord is right. There is no one national authority that certifies halal meat, and to a certain extent that is part of the problem. We have one halal authority which will certify only stunned meat, one that does only non-stunned meat and one that does both. The crux of this issue is that the Government, stakeholders and religious authorities need to start working together more closely to look at the research around stunning, which has come on in leaps and bounds in terms of recoverability from stunning and therefore whether it falls within religious guidelines. We have committed to do that and we will continue to do so.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench): My Lords, for many years Sikhs and other communities have been concerned about the provision of a halal-only option in many schools. We are advised that it is the prerogative of the local authority. It is impossible for individuals to keep complaining. Does the Minister agree that the default position must be the provision of non-halal food, and that it is up to other religious communities if they want something different?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The noble Lord makes a very strong point. It is the case that it is up to schools whether they provide halal meat. Many schools that have a significant proportion of pupils who are Muslims will supply halal meat, but they might be able to accommodate pupils of other faiths within their food provision. I reassure noble Lords that major retailers have supplier requirements that all meat on supermarket shelves is stunned before slaughter.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering (Conservative): My Lords, I am a fellow of the British Veterinary Association and a regular visitor to auction marts in the north of England. Does the Minister agree that the general problem is that there is meat being sold in this country as normal meat which is actually halal meat being passed off as normal meat? This is an urgent issue that has to be addressed by the Government. Will my noble friend explain to the House how the Government propose to address it?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I thank my noble friend for that question. I have just mentioned the actions that have already been taken by the major retailers, but the Government are well aware of public concern around meat slaughtered in accordance with religious beliefs and we believe that we need to look at labelling and improve it where we can. We believe that if we can give consumers the information they require, they can make an informed choice. The Government have committed to a review of food labelling once our future partnership with the EU is clear.

Lord Winston (Labour): My Lords, I declare an interest as an Orthodox Jew. I think the Government are to be congratulated on their sensitivity to the various religious minorities that carry out their practices in this country. The Minister mentioned the problem that stunning is not by any means absolute. We see clear evidence that some animals are wounded with current levels of stunning, and more research is needed. At a time when there is very great distrust between different communities, I hope that the Minister will agree that we need to reflect on the need to have harmony in those communities at the present moment.

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: I completely appreciate the comments made by the noble Lord. That is why this is such a very complex issue. We must understand that there are religious sensitivities around this, but I am also pleased to know that research is moving on in leaps and bounds and that in certain circumstances it will be the case that some stunned meat will be certified as halal in future.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-12-12/debates/80E34825-4745-4A90-A9F5-E1A1CC86EC70/AnimalWelfareStandards>

House of Lords Written Answer

Pupil Exclusions

Lord Ouseley (Crossbench) [HL11980] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of children excluded from school for racist bullying in England and Wales in the last year; and what assessment they have made of the implications of such bullying and exclusions for social and community cohesion.

Lord Agnew of Oulton: The most recent data from academic year 2016/2017 show that there were 25 permanent exclusions (0.3% of all permanent exclusions) and 4,565 fixed period exclusions (1.2% of all fixed period exclusions) recorded with the reason of 'racist abuse'. This includes derogatory racist statements, racist bullying, racist graffiti, racist taunting and harassment and swearing that can be attributed to racist characteristics. The data can be sourced from the National Tables spreadsheet (table 4), published at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2016-to-2017>

Racism has no place in our schools and any incident is unacceptable. The department supports head teachers using exclusion where it is warranted.

The government want to make sure that all children learn the values that underpin our society – including fairness, tolerance and respect. These values help knit our communities together, which is why education is at the heart of the government's integration strategy. All state funded schools have a legal obligation to promote community cohesion.

The government has committed to providing over £2.8 million of funding from September 2016 to March 2020 to four anti-bullying organisations to support schools to tackle bullying. This includes the Anne Frank Trust, which we are funding to develop and deliver their 'free to be' debate programme. The programme encourages young people to think about the importance of tackling prejudice, discrimination and bullying.

In November 2018, the department published the attached 'Respectful School Communities' publication, a self-review and sign-posting tool to support schools to develop a whole-school approach which promotes respect and discipline. This can combat bullying, harassment and prejudice of any kind.

In March 2018, the government launched an externally led review of exclusions practice, chaired by Edward Timpson CBE. The review is exploring how head teachers use exclusion, and why pupils with particular characteristics are more likely to be excluded from school. It is also considering the differences in exclusion rates across primary and secondary schools in England.

The full terms of reference for the review are attached.

[HL11980_Respectful_School_Communities_publication_](#)

[A_Review_of_School_Exclusion-terms_of_reference_HL](#)

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-12-03/HL11980/>

Crown Prosecution Service

Members of banned British neo-Nazi group jailed

Six people including a couple have been jailed today for 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 found guilty along with Daniel Bogunovic, 27, on 12 November 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, 29, 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. ...

When Thomas, Patatas and Bogunovic were convicted 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 a jury.”

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 ...

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. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/members-banned-british-neo-nazi-group-jailed>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons Written Answer

Gaza: Immigration Controls

Richard Burden (Labour) [201114] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what projects her Department supports to better facilitate health-related exit permits and medical delegations in Gaza.

Alistair Burt: In 2018 the Department for International Development provided £1.5 million to the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC) appeal which includes support to the capacity of eleven hospitals in Gaza. The ICRC has sent surgeons, nurses, and physiotherapists to Gaza to help the healthcare sector meet pressing health needs, including the large increase in injuries following the rise in violence since March.

The UK government also supports Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s Global Britain Fund. PHRI advocate for Palestinian patients who require access for medical care. Other activities include medical delegations to Gaza with specialists, supplying medical services and supplies to the population and the health authorities and performing essential surgeries. The delegations provide a wide range of medical services, and also joint training and seminars with medical professionals in the hospitals and health centers for Palestinian medical professionals in Gaza and Israel.

The movement restrictions and the serious constraints imposed on Gaza impact the health of the population as well as the further development of quality health services. The UK Government regularly raises the matter of medical permits and access with the Israeli authorities.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-12-11/201114/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Occupied Palestinian Territories

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated): To ask Her Majesty's Government what guidance they provide to United Kingdom companies who wish to trade with companies based in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, a company's decision to trade with businesses based in Israeli settlements is primarily commercial. When considering activities in the region, the Government urge British businesses to consider the illegal nature of Israeli settlements under international law. We also encourage British businesses to take account of our Overseas Business Risk online guidance, which provides comprehensive information on the security and political risks of trading in the region.

Baroness Tonge: I thank the Minister for that reply and for talking about international law. Is she aware that I table Questions every week concerning the actions of the Israeli Government in Palestine, putting on record the relentless expansion of those settlements and the appalling behaviour of the settlers, including the demolition of Palestinian property, the destruction of their farmland, the denial of their fishing rights and the theft of their water? Does she realise that I have asked Questions about the imprisonment of Palestinian children and the maiming and killing of others? This is not to forget the blockade of Gaza, which the United Nations has said will be uninhabitable by 2020. Does she agree that these are all examples of Israel breaking international law, human rights law and the Fourth Geneva Convention? The Government have admitted this in the Answers that I receive, which I have here. When will our Government stop talking and writing Answers to Questions and take action to stop Israel's illegal activities, as they do when other countries misbehave? Do we have to wait another 70 years?

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, I am aware of the noble Baroness's interest in this area and of the many Written Questions that she has laid down. To restate what has been outlined on numerous occasions, the UK's position on the settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of the two-state solution. That is why we supported UN Security Council Resolution 2334, regularly raise our grave concerns on this issue with the Government of Israel and urge them to reverse their policy on settlement expansion.

Baroness Redfern (Conservative): My Lords, while consumers undoubtedly have the right to know the origin of the goods they buy, does the Minister agree that it sets a dangerous precedent to encourage consumers to determine their purchases on the ethnicity or nationality of the producer?

Baroness Manzoor: I thank my noble friend for that question. We understand the concerns of people who do not wish to purchase goods exported from Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We also welcome the European Commission's decision in November 2015 to issue indication of origin guidelines for products produced in the Israeli settlements. It is up to British retailers who stock settlement produce to voluntarily adopt the labelling policy recommended by Defra.

Lord Turnberg (Labour) Is the Minister aware that some 50,000 Palestinians work for

Israeli companies in the West Bank and that Israeli trade unions ensure that the Palestinians are paid at exactly the same rate as the Israelis for the same jobs and receive the same benefits? I can do no better than quote Nabil Basherat, a Palestinian who said: "The BDS movement has threatened my job security and livelihood ... and damaged the livelihoods of hundreds ... of factory workers".

Does the Minister agree that the BDS movement damages Palestinians much more than it does Israel?

Baroness Manzoor: My Lords, I agree that boycotts of any kind are damaging for both Palestinians and Israelis. The UK strongly opposes boycotts of Israel, which divide people and reduce understanding, but, as I said, that is why the UK, along with many businesses and institutions, operates a policy of differentiation in relation to Israeli borders. It is quite right that we take the stance that there are no boycotts in these areas because they damage the economy for both sides. ...

Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat): Does the Minister agree that British companies must ensure that none of their products is used in the demolition of Palestinian homes and properties in the Occupied Territories? In her response, will she address in particular the use of JCB bulldozers in the flattening of Palestinian homes and schools?

Baroness Manzoor: I have already made known our stance on the boycotting of goods. The UK Government have had discussions with JCB on a range of subjects. Where a company decides to trade is ultimately a decision for each company to reach, taking account of the legal and regulatory environment as well as international human rights law. The British Government will continue to encourage and foster respect for human rights among UK businesses.

Lord Pickles (Conservative): My Lords, surely the point made by the noble Lord opposite is pursuant: unemployment and poverty further extremism. Surely it makes sense to spread prosperity given that 10% of the working population in the West Bank is employed within these settlements. Given that the Oslo accords envisage land swaps, surely it makes sense for peace to spread prosperity and give people a chance to get out of the hands of the men of blood.

Baroness Manzoor: I entirely agree with my noble friend.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour): My Lords, the opportunity is there. If you had listened to the radio this morning, you would have heard young Palestinians and Israelis desiring the same thing: the opportunity to prosper and use their skills. What are the Government doing to ensure we have two communities working together and that we end up with a two-state solution, in which both communities can prosper?

Baroness Manzoor: As the noble Lord is aware, the UK Government support a two-state solution. As I have said, the UK is a close friend of Israel and we enjoy excellent bilateral relationships. The British Government helped to establish the UK Israel Tech Hub, a non-profit organisation based in Tel Aviv and London, to help British companies looking for cutting-edge innovation and Israeli start-ups seeking to go through the UK. This kind of innovation is important to help individuals living in both Israel and Palestine, and to ensure we have good economic prosperity in the region.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-12-17/debates/09163D1C-A6CE-47F2-82BF-0C00EC43BCD8/OccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

House of Lords Written Answers

Jerusalem: Cultural Heritage

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11995] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage the protection of the historical and archaeological diversity of East Jerusalem; and what assessment they have made of the current excavations supported by the government of Israel which are reportedly being used to

create fake Jewish tombs around the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not made any assessment on this issue, we are strongly opposed to any attempts to change the facts on the ground in East Jerusalem.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-12-03/HL11995/>

Israel: Bedouin

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11996] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to take steps to ensure that the village of Khan Al-Ahmer is not demolished by Israeli authorities.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware that Israel has postponed the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar in order to exhaust negotiations for evacuation by agreement. We continue to urge the Israeli authorities not to go ahead with their plan to demolish the village.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-12-03/HL11996/>

Israel: Gaza

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11997] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they intend to make to the government of Israel about the release of medical supplies confiscated by Israel authorities from the Gaza Freedom Flotilla; and when they anticipate the government of Israel will release the supplies.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: On 23 August 2018, the Office of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories informed officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv that the supplies carried on the vessels were delivered into the Gaza Strip via the Erez crossing.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-12-03/HL11997/>

Sheikh Sayah Al-Turi

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL11999] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they are making representations to the government of Israel about the detention of Sheikh Sayah Abu Madhi'm A-Turi; and if so, what has been the response.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not raised this issue with the Israeli authorities.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-12-03/HL11999/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL12000] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the plan by the government of Israel to build 2,300 houses for Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox population on the site of the Deir Yassin massacre.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not made any assessment on this issue.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-12-03/HL12000/>

Department for International Development

UK aid to provide emergency food to 62,000 Palestinian refugees in Gaza

UK aid is providing emergency food including rice, sugar and chickpeas to 62,000 Palestinian refugees in Gaza who are at risk of going hungry.

Refugees in Gaza are extremely vulnerable following recurrent bouts of conflict, restrictions on access and movement, high poverty rates, high unemployment levels and rising costs of living. According to the UN, around 80 per cent of Gazan households are dependent on food aid. To meet their emergency and basic needs UK aid is providing essentials including flour, rice, sugar, chickpeas, sunflower oil, whole milk, lentils and canned sardines to counter food supply problems affecting refugees who are unable to afford rising food prices in Gaza.

Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt said: I am deeply concerned about the worsening situation in the Gaza strip, and once again UK aid gives a message to the people of Gaza that we have not forgotten them or their plight.

It is right that we act to make sure that refugees in Gaza know where their next meal will come from and improve the dignity of their lives.

We have been clear that a political settlement is the only way to ensure lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis alike. All parties must redouble their political efforts and return to the negotiating table, not only to address the deteriorating conditions in Gaza, but to ensure tragedies of the past months are not repeated.

The package is part of wider support to Gaza through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), through which UK aid is providing healthcare and education to 1.3 million people in Gaza, as well as more than 800,000 refugees in the West Bank. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-to-provide-emergency-food-to-62000-palestinian-refugees-in-gaza>

United Nations

UN calls for funds to ease ‘deteriorating’ humanitarian situation in Gaza and West Bank

The need for aid in the occupied Palestinian territory has increased, following a year that has seen a “serious deterioration in the humanitarian situation,” said Jamie McGoldrick, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the region ...

Mr. McGoldrick’s comments were released as part of the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan for the occupied Palestinian territory, which calls for \$350 million to assist 1.4 million people, the maximum number of people that the UN can, he said, realistically reach in the current “non-conducive political and resource climate.”

“Our plan for 2019 prioritizes assistance for people assessed as being most in need of protection, food, health care, shelter, water and sanitation,” said Mr. McGoldrick. “It enables us to maximize limited funding. But much more is needed, and we stand ready to do more, if funding and operational space are improved.”

The Humanitarian Coordinator described 2018 as a challenging year for UN agencies and aid workers in the region, particularly in Gaza. There were recurrent outbreaks of violence and a significant rise in casualties from [demonstrations](#) at the border fence between Gaza and Israel, referred to by Palestinians as the “Great March of Return.”

Since March, over 150 Palestinians have reportedly been killed, and more than 10,000 injured, by Israeli forces in connection with the demonstrations: consequently, the funding requested for health services in 2019 has gone up, reflecting the surge in demand on an already overburdened health sector in Gaza. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1028711>

Humanitarian January-December 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan: Occupied Palestinian Territory

https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/humanitarian_response_plan_2019.pdf

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Foreign Affairs

See also House of Lords oral answers on “Animal Welfare Standards” which is included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Lords Written Answer

Overseas Aid

Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench) [HL12011] To ask Her Majesty's Government what proportion of official development assistance is distributed through faith-based organisations.

Lord Bates: UK official development assistance is distributed through a wide range of bilateral and multilateral partners. DFID does not disaggregate and retain specific information on funding distributed to faith-based organisations. This information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-12-04/HL12011/>

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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>

Palestinian Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/palestinianstatehoodrecognition.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

**** closes in 3 days**

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>

Islamophobia (closing date 11 January 2018)

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/news-parliament-2017/islamophobia-call-for-further-evidence-17-19/>

Connected communities – Tackling loneliness and social isolation (Wales) (closing date 15 January 2019)

<https://beta.gov.wales/connected-communities-tackling-loneliness-and-social-isolation>

The Macpherson Report: Twenty Years On (closing date 16 January 2019)

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/macpherson-report-twenty-years-on-inquiry-17-19/>

Extremism in England and Wales (closing date 31 January 2019)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/extremism-in-england-and-wales-call-for-evidence>

Racial harassment in higher education (closing date 15 February 2019)

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/inquiries-and-investigations/racial-harassment-higher-education-our-inquiry>

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://consult.gov.scot/hate-crime/consultation-on-scottish-hate-crime-legislation/>

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