

# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### Westminster Hall Debate

#### Sharia Law Courts

*col 195WH* **John Howell (Conservative):** ... The genesis of this debate is a report prepared for the Council of Europe in January ... The report ... looked at the compatibility of sharia law with the European convention on human rights. ... The report singled out the UK, not completely approvingly, for how it approached this issue ...

When approaching this issue, I am aware that the charge of Islamophobia may be levelled against us, but it is right that we consider sharia law courts or councils in terms of their conformity with the European convention on human rights, just as we do with other aspects of UK society. I am also aware of “The independent review into the application of sharia law in England and Wales”, which was produced in February 2018. ...

The Council of Europe called on the authorities of the United Kingdom to do a number of things. ... First, it called on the UK to “ensure that sharia councils operate within the law, especially as it relates to the prohibition of discrimination against women, and respect all procedural rights.”

Secondly, it called on the UK to review the Marriage Act 1949, to make it a legal requirement for Muslim couples to civilly register their marriage before or at the same time as their Islamic ceremony, as”—the report claims—“is already stipulated by law for Christian and Jewish marriages.”

Thirdly, the Council called on the UK to “take appropriate enforcement measures to oblige the celebrant of any marriage, including Islamic marriages, to ensure that the marriage is also civilly registered before or at the same time as celebrating the religious marriage.”

Fourthly, it called on the UK to ensure that vulnerable women are provided with safeguards against exploitation and informed about their right to seek redress before UK courts. ...

*col 196WH* ... sharia law is understood as the law to be obeyed by every Muslim. ... It makes two forms of legal ruling: one designed to organise society and one to deal with everyday situations. It also has a legal opinion, intended to cover a special situation.

*col 197WH* In Islamic family law, men have authority over women, because God has made the one superior to the other. It goes on to say that good women are obedient. It encourages women who stray from those norms to suffer punishment. ... In practice,

women are obliged to be accompanied by men when they go out, which is not conducive to their independence.

Under Islamic law, a husband has a unilateral right to divorce, although it can be delegated to the wife and she can therefore exercise her right to divorce. ...

Non-Muslims do not have the same rights as Muslims in criminal and civil law under sharia law. ...

The European Court of Human Rights had the chance to rule on the incompatibility of sharia law with human rights in the early 2000s, in its judgment on the Welfare party v. Turkey ...

*col 198WH* ... the Court clearly affirmed the following: "It is difficult to declare one's respect for democracy and human rights while at the same time supporting a regime based on sharia, which clearly diverges from Convention values, particularly with regard to its criminal law and criminal procedure, its rules on the legal status of women and the way it intervenes in all spheres of private and public life in accordance with religious precepts." ... However, although the Court has ruled that sharia law is incompatible with the convention, that does not mean that there is absolute incompatibility between the convention and Islam. ...

There is currently no single accepted definition of the term "sharia council" in the United Kingdom, where such bodies generally provide advice and attempt to resolve disputes relating to family or personal issues according to the principles of sharia law. However, little is known about their work, which is conducted in private, and decisions are not published, leading to a lack of transparency and accountability. There is also uncertainty about the number of sharia courts operating in the UK. ...

*col 199WH* Sharia councils are not considered part of the British legal system. They are not courts and their decisions are not legally binding. ... the power of sharia councils lies in how they are perceived by their communities. ...

A significant number of Muslims do not have a marriage recognised under British law. Those who do not register their marriage under civil law, and some who have been married abroad, have little redress available to them, as their position under British law is similar to that of unmarried cohabitants ...

Furthermore, even in cases where women have a civil law marriage, some might seek the decision of a sharia council for reasons of self-identity or community standing, or to provide reassurance that they have the religious freedom to remarry within their faith. Those who obtain a civil divorce but not a religious divorce might find it difficult to remarry ... One of the experts invited to testify before the committee, Ms Zee, denounced what she described as "marital captivity". ...

*col 200WH* Sharia councils should not be confused with arbitration tribunals. The Muslim Arbitration Tribunal was established in 2007 under the Arbitration Act 1996. It operates within the framework of British law and its decisions can be enforced by civil courts ...

It is often proposed that, based on the evidence of discriminatory practices in some sharia councils, they should all be shut down and banned. The main problem with that argument is that a ban cannot be imposed on organisations that can set up voluntarily anywhere and that operate only on the basis of the credibility given to them by a certain community. ...

*col 201WH* It is clear from all the evidence that sharia councils are fulfilling a need in some Muslim communities. There is a demand for religious divorce that is being answered by the sharia councils. That demand will not simply end if they are banned and closed down; instead, that could lead to them simply going underground ...

The main point is that there needs to be an acceptance of the law of the land, as there is within other communities, particularly the Jewish community, whose members accept that British law overrides their religious law. It is impossible to understand why somebody would enter a sharia court voluntarily, when they know that they are going to be under pressure to conform with whatever is said there. ...

**Naz Shah (Labour):** ... Sharia councils are not entirely fit for purpose ... however, that

while it is right that we debate the fact that sharia councils have a huge way to go, we must not throw the baby out with the bathwater. ...

*col 202WH* I really struggle with the idea that somehow Muslims need to accept the law of the land—Muslims do accept the law of the land. The majority of Muslims in this country, as with the majority of people of any faith or the majority of people of no faith, accept the law of this land. ... Muslims do have respect for the law, and I take it very personally and feel really offended at the suggestion that Muslims need to accept the law of the land. ...

*col 203WH* ... sharia courts do serve a purpose. They might not be brilliant and I absolutely agree that they need some regulation. ...

We all agree that sharia councils cannot be abolished, as that would send them underground and we do not want that to happen. This service has to be available. As a Muslim woman, I need the sharia council; I want to be able to access the sharia council, but yes, I also want it to be fit for purpose. ...

I do not have an issue with anybody criticising my religion; ... The definition—the definition by the all-party parliamentary group on British Muslims—of Islamophobia clearly sets out that there is nothing wrong with people having a debate about what Islam is and what Islam is not. However, in this debate today the hon. Gentleman referred to the Casey review, and when talking about it he said that its findings included sharia councils supporting extremists and wife-beating. I get some of that context, but the whole idea of extremism in sharia councils—I have yet to come across that. That is not the debate that I hoped to have today, and I did not expect to hear the word “extremist” mentioned in this debate. ...

*col 206WH* **Stuart C McDonald (SNP):** ... I went on to the website of Glasgow Central Mosque ... That page goes on to say: “We can perform religious marriages, which are recognised by the law. A marriage ceremony (Nikah) at Glasgow Central Mosque must also be a religious marriage (i.e. the legal equivalent of a civil marriage conducted by a registrar). Our Imams are authorised to solemnise religious marriages, therefore it is not necessary to have a separate civil marriage. If the civil marriage has already taken place, please bring the marriage certificate on the day.” ...

I read an article by a Muslim woman who is a solicitor in Glasgow, who wrote about how the culture in the Glasgow mosques is one of working together to ensure that the civil requirements are met at the same time as the religious ones. ...

**John Howell:** ... as I understand it, only in the Anglican Church and the Church in Wales is the priest automatically a registrar. ...

**Stuart C McDonald:** ... I understand—I repeat, I am not a family lawyer, so I might be completely wrong—that that is not the position in Scotland ...

*col 209WH* **Nick Thomas-Symonds (Labour):** ... Protection of the rights of religious minorities is an essential feature of any democratic society, and there is a richness to our culture in the United Kingdom. We have people who practise many different religions. It is right that the state should not prevent people from acting according to their religious beliefs and cultural traditions, provided that, first, it does not break the law—I include in that being compliant with our human rights obligations—and, secondly, it is always a product of free choice and by consent. ...

*col 210WH* **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar):** ... As the Prime Minister has said, and as Members have mentioned today, there is one rule of law in the United Kingdom. In practice, that means, within each of the UK jurisdictions, a single system of law, legislated according to our constitutional arrangements by this Parliament or the devolved Administrations. Our judicial systems interpret, apply and, where necessary, enforce those laws. There is no parallel system of sharia law in operation in the UK; Her Majesty’s courts enforce our laws. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley was right to say that sharia law is not part of the British legal system. We must ensure that we do not succour such misinformation or misconceptions beyond these walls. ...

Our vision for our communities is that all British citizens, whatever their religious background, should be free to practise individual religious freedom. Many British people of different faiths and none benefit a great deal from the guidance that religious codes and other practices offer. Those values allow us to enjoy our individual freedoms and to lead varied lives in diverse communities. That is one of the great strengths of this great country; however, it has to be within a framework in which citizens share and respect common rights and responsibilities, with unfettered access to national law and our legal institutions to enforce those rights when necessary. ...

If there is any conflict between religious practices and national law, national law must, and will, always prevail. ...

*col 211WH* I acknowledge too the views set out by the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in its resolution, passed in January this year, about the need to combat all forms of discrimination based on religion. ...

While supporting and, I argue, even encouraging pluralism, the resolution expressed concern about the official or unofficial application of what it termed “sharia law” in several Council of Europe member states. As hon. Members have set out, in relation to the UK specifically the Council of Europe set out its concern about what it views as the judicial activities of sharia councils that, although not part of the British legal system, attempt to provide a form of alternative dispute resolution. ...

*col 212WH* We will continue to engage with key stakeholders, including faith groups, academics and lawyers, to test their views on the policy and the legal challenges of limited reform relating to the law on marriage and religious ceremonies. ...

*col 213WH* The Home Office review found some evidence of sharia councils in England and Wales forcing women to make concessions to gain a divorce, of inadequate safeguarding policies and of a failure to signpost applicants to legal remedies. That is clearly not acceptable ...

*col 214WH* The Government are clear that we must do more to support people in faith communities to make informed choices about how to live their lives. Key to that is our work on integration and on a shared understanding of British values and the system of law that underpins them. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-05-02/debates/201F2DB0-FCE5-412F-AAB8-83CAA66F308A/ShariaLawCourts>

*The following documents were referred to in the above debate (listed in the order they were mentioned):*

**Compatibility of Sharia law with the European Convention on Human Rights: can States Parties to the Convention be signatories to the “Cairo Declaration”?**

<https://tinyurl.com/y6efughf>

**The independent review into the application of sharia law in England and Wales**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/678478/6.4152\\_HO\\_CPFGR\\_Report\\_into\\_Sharia\\_Law\\_in\\_the\\_UK\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/678478/6.4152_HO_CPFGR_Report_into_Sharia_Law_in_the_UK_WEB.pdf)

**European Court of Human Rights Judgment: Case of Refah Partisi (the Welfare Party) and Others v. Turkey**

<http://www.legal-tools.org/doc/cd91e0/pdf/>

**Select Committee on Home Affairs Inquiry into Sharia Councils** (*inquiry not completed due to the 2017 General Election*)

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/inquiry6/>

**Report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims: Islamophobia Defined**  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

**The Casey Review A review into opportunity and integration**  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/575973/The\\_Casey\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf)

**Council of Europe Resolution: Sharia, the Cairo Declaration and the European Convention on Human Rights**  
<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=25353>

## House of Commons Oral Answer

### Business of the House: Visas for Ministers of Religion

**Patrick Grady (SNP):** The Leader of the House values the contribution that faith communities make to our society, so will she arrange for a Home Office Minister to urgently come to the House and explain why recent changes to the tier 5 visa system will make it more difficult for churches and temples to bring in supply ministers over the summer? Catholic churches in my constituency are very concerned—the issue is on the front page of the archdiocesan newspaper—and she will know that the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) raised this matter with the Prime Minister. When will a Minister come and explain this unnecessary and unexplained change of policy?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I certainly recall my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire raising the matter at Prime Minister's questions. If I recall, the Prime Minister said that she would ensure that it was considered. I will also take steps to ensure that the Home Office are aware of this particular concern. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write to me with any specific examples, that would be helpful.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-05-02/debates/15D696DD-72D7-47DA-BDCF-E2EDE3741317/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-E0FD7561-EE1E-44C1-8989-E64B2DD5F09C>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Marriage

**Martin Vickers (Conservative) [246991]** To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether the Government plans to (a) restrict or (b) remove the charitable status of Churches and other faith-based organisations who express and practise historic orthodox beliefs on the doctrine of marriage.

**Mims Davies:** To be a charity, institutions, including Churches and other faith-based organisations in England and Wales, must meet the legal test for charitable status set out in the Charities Act 2011. This requires the institution to have a wholly charitable purpose for the benefit of the public. The advancement of religion has long been recognised as a charitable purpose. There is no presumption that a particular charitable purpose is for the public benefit.

The Charity Commission, as the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales, is responsible for assessing if an institution meets the legal test for charitable status. There are no plans to change the legal test for charitable status which applies to Churches and other faith-based organisations who express and practise historic orthodox beliefs on the doctrine of marriage.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-24/246991/>

### Visas: Religious Persons

**Ronnie Cowan (SNP)** [248722] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent discussions his Department has had with faith leaders regarding the Tier 5 religious worker visa.

**Reply from Caroline Nokes:** The Government wrote to faith leaders in December, setting out the detail of the changes made to the Tier 5 religious worker visa.

We are embarking on an extensive programme of engagement, in connection with the future immigration system, and will be talking to representatives from a range of faith and community groups. Officials also remain in regular contact with their representatives.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248722/>

### Religious Buildings: Security

**Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op)** [248689] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the recently announced funding for protecting places of worship has been allocated.

**Victoria Atkins:** On 19 March 2019, the Home Secretary announced a boost in funding for the hate crime Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme to £1.6 million for 2019/20. This is double the amount awarded in 2018/19. £5 million over three years has also been committed to providing security training to places of worship in England and Wales. This will enable staff and volunteers to develop the security understanding necessary to make physical security measures work effectively. This increase in funding marks a significant change in our funding for protective security for places of worship.

The Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme has been running for three years, and we continuously listen to feedback. We are now working urgently to make commercial improvements to the 2019/20 scheme to make it more effective and easier for places of worship to apply. The application process for the scheme will go live in July 2019 with allocations being made thereafter.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248689/>

*Information about the Places of Worship Security Funding Scheme can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

*The announcement referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/places-of-worship-to-get-security-funding-boost>

### Football: Racial Discrimination

**Matthew Offord (Conservative)** [247007] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to tackle racism in amateur football.

**Mims Davies:** Following my summit on Feb 25th, Government is working with key groups to deliver clear, tangible actions to tackle racism at all levels of football. As per my statement to the house on 11th April, my intention is to announce these interventions, in partnership with football, before the end of the summer.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-24/247007/>

## UK Parliament Early Day Motions

**Patrick Grady (SNP) (2362) Tier 5 visas for Ministers of Religion** – That this House notes with concern the decision of the Home Office to remove Ministers of Religion from the eligibility criteria for tier 5 entry visas to the UK; further notes the widespread disappointment about this decision felt by Churches and other faith communities which have previously been able to invite religious ministers from overseas, and particularly developing countries, to provide supply cover for religious services over the coming months; believes this will have a negative effect on the ability of priests and ministers in the UK to take a break over the summer, on faith communities who may experience reduced worship schedules, and on the supply ministers who have used the opportunity to gain experience in the UK and earn some additional income before returning to their home country; and calls on the Home Secretary to meet with representatives of faith communities to listen to their concerns and urgently review his Department's policy decision.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/52889/tier-5-visas-for-ministers-of-religion>

**Stuart C McDonald (SNP) (2358) Changes to visa requirements for religious workers** – That this House is concerned that changes to the immigration rules regarding religious workers, announced in December 2018, are having a negative impact on the ability of churches and other religious organisations to carry out their work and worship; notes in particular that these changes introduce additional costs, a lengthy cooling-off period and language tests even for religious workers who have extensive experience of working in the UK, making it difficult for parishes and other religious bodies to secure the return of individuals with whom they have a long standing relationship; and calls on the Home Office to suspend implementation of these changes and to consult with religious organisations about how a fairer system can be introduced that better supports their work.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/52887/changes-to-visa-requirements-for-religious-workers>

## Welsh Assembly Briefing

**What is being done to tackle racism in Wales?**

<https://seneddresearch.blog/2019/05/03/what-is-being-done-to-tackle-racism-in-wales/>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### Israel: Hezbollah

**Craig Tracey (Conservative) [247742]** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on reports that the Israel Defense Forces recently exposed a Hezbollah cell preparing an attack on Israel.

**Mark Field:** Whilst the Foreign Secretary has not had discussions with the Israel Defense Forces about this issue, the British Government routinely discusses concerns about the actions of Hizballah with the Israeli authorities.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-25/247742/>

### Israel: Palestinians

**Lee Rowley (Conservative)** [247768] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

**Mark Field:** We firmly believe a just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians is long overdue. We believe that negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between Israelis and Palestinians, supported by the international community. We have encouraged the US Administration to bring forward detailed proposals for a viable peace agreement that addresses the legitimate concerns of both parties. We continue to believe the best way to achieve this is through substantive peace talks between the parties leading to a two-state solution with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-25/247768/>

### Gaza: Health Professions

**Jo Stevens (Labour)** [248708] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what estimate she has made of the number of Palestinian health workers in Gaza allegedly killed by Israeli Defence Force actions in the last two years.

**Harriett Baldwin:** The UK is aware of the danger healthcare workers face while working in Gaza and continues to remain deeply concerned. The World Health Organisation reported that, in the context of protests, from March 2018 to March 2019, 3 healthcare personnel have been killed and 731 injured, with a total of 446 total incidents against health staff and facilities. We have raised our concerns about the excessive volume of live fire that Israel has used to respond to protests, including against medics, and we have stressed to Israel the importance of protecting those delivering medical services.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248708/>

### Gaza: Diseases

**Jo Stevens (Labour)** [248709] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the effect of the Israeli blockade of Gaza on (a) infant mortality rates, (b) levels of malnutrition, (c) instances of communicable diseases per 100,000 people and (d) prevalence of diseases related to poor sanitation in that territory.

**Harriett Baldwin:** We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and continually monitor the impact on both children and adults living there. We are particularly concerned about the health sector: UN OCHA's 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview estimates 900,000 people are in need of humanitarian health interventions in Gaza. DFID regularly reviews key warning indicators on health, food security, protection, shelter, water and sanitation, and energy and fuel reserves in Gaza, to ensure that we can flexibly respond to urgent needs on the ground. Last month we provided an additional £2 million to the ICRC to support the health sector in Gaza.

We continue to stress to the Israeli authorities the damage that their restrictions on movement and access are doing to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians and the impact they have on the humanitarian situation, in particular the health of the population in Gaza and the development of health services there.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248709/>

### **Gaza: Israel**

**Lisa Nandy (Labour)** [248666] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to the Government of Israel in response to the UN independent Commission of Inquiry's findings that there were reasonable grounds to conclude that 35 children attending protests in Gaza between 30 March and 31 December 2018 were killed unlawfully by Israeli security forces.

**Mark Field:** The UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defense Forces police protests and the Gaza perimeter, including the use of live ammunition. It is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties. In particular we have stressed the importance of protecting civilians, especially children and medical personnel. The Minister of State raised Gaza with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 30 April, and the UK raised it at the UN Security Council on 29 April. On 18 March, the EU gave an intervention on the UN Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry, in which we expressed our concern about the high number of Palestinians killed and injured and the use of excessive force including live fire, and condemned violence and provocations against Israel by Hamas and other militant groups.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248666/>

### **Gaza: Demonstrations**

**Lisa Nandy (Labour)** [248667] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to help ensure there is an (a) independent, (b) transparent and (c) thorough investigation into each child fatality that occurred during protests in Gaza between 30 March and 31 December 2018.

**Mark Field:** The UK fully supports the need for an independent and transparent investigation which establishes the facts about the recent violence in Gaza. We have repeatedly called for such an investigation at the highest levels, as well as in multiple forums, including in Parliament in an Urgent Question on 22 March, and at the UN Security Council. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv raised Gaza with the Israeli authorities in March, highlighting the importance of proportionality, and raising concerns about the volume of live fire against unarmed women, children and medics. We will continue to make clear to the Israeli authorities that it is vital their investigations are independent and transparent and that their findings are made public, and importantly, if wrongdoing is found, those that are responsible are held to account.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248667/>

### **Israel: Schools**

**Lisa Nandy (Labour)** [248668] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the reported firing of tear gas into an elementary school in the Israeli-controlled area of Hebron city by Israeli forces on 21 February 2019.

**Mark Field:** While we have not raised this specific issue with the Government of Israel, we regularly raise concerns about Israel's use of force in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. While we recognise Israel's legitimate need to deploy security measures, we encourage them to deploy these in a way which minimises tension and to use appropriate force. We have stressed in particular the need to protect children. In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we have advocated for swift, transparent investigations.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248668/>

## Israel: West Bank

**Lisa Nandy (Labour)** [248669] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent representations she has made to her Israeli counterpart on the reported destruction of three water connections supplying water to the West bank in February 2019.

**Mark Field:** While we have not made any representations on this specific matter, the UK has raised concerns over access to water in the Occupied Palestinian Territories with the Israeli authorities, including stressing the urgent need for Israel to take immediate and practical measures to improve the current situation and ensure fair distribution of water in the West Bank and Gaza. We have repeatedly made clear to the Israeli authorities our serious concern at the increase in demolitions of Palestinian properties in Area C of the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. We call on them to cease the policy of demolitions and provide a clear, transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-29/248669/>

## Foreign and Commonwealth Office

### Updated travel advice: Israel

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

### Updated travel advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

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

**Mark Field:** I am deeply saddened by the civilian deaths in Israel and Gaza over the past 24 hours. Hamas' indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israeli communities are totally unacceptable. Strongly support UN efforts to de-escalate the situation.

<https://twitter.com/MarkFieldUK/status/1124980696412491778>

## United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

### Statement by United Nations Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov on the situation in Gaza

I am deeply concerned by yet another dangerous escalation in Gaza and the tragic loss of life. My thoughts and prayers go out to the family and friends of all those who were killed, and I wish a speedy recovery to the injured.

The United Nations is working with Egypt and all sides to calm the situation. I call on all parties to immediately de-escalate and return to the understandings of the past few months. Those who seek to destroy them will bear responsibility for a conflict that will have grave consequences for all. Continuing down the current path of escalation will quickly undo what has been achieved and destroy the chances for long term solutions to the crisis. This endless cycle of violence must end, and efforts must accelerate to realize a political solution to the crisis in Gaza. The current violence jeopardizes the significant progress made in recent weeks to relieve the suffering of people in Gaza, lift the closures, and support intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

<https://unsco.unmissions.org/statement-united-nations-special-coordinator-nickolay-mladenov-situation-gaza>

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## Foreign Affairs

### Foreign and Commonwealth Office

**Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians: Interim Report**

<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/interim-report.pdf>

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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>

**International Development Assistance (Palestinian National Authority Schools) Bill**

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

**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

**Online Harms White Paper** (closing date 1 July 2019)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>

**Opt-out organ donation: organs and tissues excluded from the new system** (closing date 22 July 2019)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/opt-out-organ-donation-organs-and-tissues-excluded-from-the-new-system>

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