

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs
Holocaust

Relevant Legislation
Consultations

Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answer

Visas: Ministers of Religion

David Linden (SNP): Earlier this week, I received a letter from Father Liam McMahon, who is the parish priest at St Michael's on Gallowgate in Parkhead. Like many other ministers and those in the clergy, he is concerned about the changes to tier 5 religious worker visas. May we have a debate in Government time about early-day motion 2362, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), to ensure that the Home Office reverses these retrograde plans that will disproportionately impact parishes right across the United Kingdom?

[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.]

I know the Leader of the House is sympathetic and a practising Christian. Will she be a voice in Government to U-turn on this ridiculous decision by the Home Office that will affect parishes all across these islands?

Andrea Leadsom: This issue has been raised a couple of times. Of course, we want to be able to facilitate visits by religious leaders around the world to talk to parishes here in the United Kingdom. There are arrangements—I am struggling to remember, but I think they can apply under tier 2 visa arrangements and that there are some pauses in place to ensure that those visas remain temporary. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman seeks an Adjournment debate, so that Ministers can set out for him precisely how visitors can apply for visas.

Holocaust

House of Lords Debate

Second Reading, Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

col 1378 Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Conservative): ... The Bill may be short and simple, but it is important because it deals with the legacy of that dark and uniquely evil period of European history in the last century—the Nazi era. Between 1933 and 1945, thousands upon thousands of works of art were stolen. At any time that would be shocking and scandalous, but it was far worse than that. This widespread seizure of cultural objects was part of a grotesque and systematic campaign by the Nazis to eliminate a whole race and culture.

col 1379 Ten years ago, Parliament passed the Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) Act, to allow national museums and galleries to return works of art and cultural objects confiscated during the Nazi era to those with a rightful claim to them. However, the original Act has a sunset clause and is due to expire this year. This Bill would remove the sunset clause so that the provisions of the Act can continue indefinitely. It does not introduce a new policy but seeks simply to remove a statutory barrier. ...

The Act allows the 17 national institutions listed in it to return items lost during the Nazi era where there is a legitimate claim. Claims are assessed by the Spoliation Advisory Panel, established in 2000. The panel's recommendations are not binding but the museum or gallery concerned has always complied with the recommendations. ...

Many potential claimants may still be unaware of the location of objects which had been in the possession of their families. It takes time for people to come forward with claims, and for national museums and galleries to research the provenance of items with an incomplete history. For anyone who doubts this, the figures tell the story. During the whole of its life, the Spoliation Advisory Panel has advised on only 20 claims and only 13 cultural objects have been returned. So this whole process takes time, which is precisely what this Bill provides.

col 1380 ... this legislation deals with works of art but the motivation behind it—the driving force—is less about material objects as such and more about ameliorating, as best we can, the suffering endured by so many families in this terrible period. ... I believe that this Bill, short and simple though it may be, gives us all the opportunity to send a strong and powerful signal: that anti-Semitism and racism in all its forms must be fought in every corner of society.

col 1381 Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat): ... This is a worldwide problem. Removing the sunset clause by the UK will serve as an example to other countries. France is considering the need for legal action to make possible deaccessioning—a dreadful word—of artworks looted by the Nazis that are in state museums. Deaccessioning is the process in which a work of art or other object is permanently removed from a museum's collection. My question to the Minister is: should this further action be implemented or at least considered in the UK? ...

We are considering this Bill in a disturbing climate of anti-Semitism worldwide, and the UK is also experiencing such an upsurge. This Bill is not going to curb anti-Semitism, but it may just help to right some wrongs. ...

Lord Pickles (Conservative): ... It would be churlish of me at this time, given the announcement made this week, not to thank the Government and the Minister here today for the additional support for the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, which is due to be built outside the Houses of Parliament. We are particularly pleased to receive the endorsement of the Prime Minister, and the former Prime Ministers David Cameron, Gordon Brown, Tony Blair and John Major, in addition to the Leaders of the Houses of Lords and Commons, the all-party group, the Mayor of London, the London Assembly, the Chief Rabbi, the Dean of Westminster, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Jewish Leadership Council, the Association of Jewish Refugees, the Wiener Library, the National Holocaust Centre in Newark, the Imperial War Museum, the University of Huddersfield Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre, the Anne Frank Trust, the '45 Aid Society, the Learning from the Righteous, the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, the Holocaust Survivors' Centre in Hendon, the University College London Centre for Holocaust Education and the nine synagogues in Westminster City Council. ... I know there are some who say that it is the right idea, but the wrong place. Some may even believe that, but they are wrong: the place is the point. Outside this building is the natural place for it to be. It is close to where all important decisions on Britain's involvement in the Holocaust were made—the good ones, the bad ones and those of complete indifference. It is my hope that when the memorial and learning centre is built, visitors will leave there and look towards this building and recognise that it is a bastion against tyrants. I hope, too, that when we look out at that memorial we will remember that, as legislators, we always have a choice: we can either protect civil liberties or oppress our citizens. ...

col 1382 I turn to the Bill. ... Do not think for a moment that this was confined to a bunch of Nazis. Their loot from Jewish people was an important part of the economy in the years of the Second World War. That was how people got their fur coat, their bit of jewellery, a nice mirror and the like. What was not looted by your neighbours was often taken by the state and sold outside your house or at special sales. The very clothes of the poor victims of Babi Yar, who were stripped and laid in pits, were sold close to the execution site. Do not let anyone say that nobody knew about this.

If we were to announce that, henceforth, property rights would be determined by the Nazis' Nuremberg laws, people would rightly be outraged, but that is what we have effectively done in large parts of the world by putting so many obstacles in the way of restitution of stolen property. ...

col 1383 We need to remember that, whether it is a painting or a book or a porcelain jar, every object represents the life and lives of those who were lost. Their restitution restores a personal connection, a link with those lives so utterly transformed or destroyed by the Nazis. ...

col 1384 **Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** ... The restitution of these works of art is somewhat unusual, in that the restorer is not usually the wrongdoer but a museum that may have purchased the object in good faith—but it is symbolically important. The rightful owners or their near descendants are still alive, and it sends a message to this war-torn world that, if the enemy despoiler does his worst, nevertheless, in the end that wrong will be righted. ...

In another way, too, this is unfinished business. What about the real property looted during the Nazi era, most of which is situated and identifiable within EU countries ... The Terezin declaration, to which this country is a party, called on those countries that have not yet made restitution to do so along the lines of the declaration. The most egregious offender is Poland, squatting on the property of 3 million victims of the Nazis—the only country in modern Europe to refuse to set up a scheme for compensation ... racism is rising across Europe and, sadly, to spend £105 million on a Holocaust memorial—something like the sixth in this country, in the wrong place, which does not speak to the heart—will not stop anti-Semitism. It is a sad state of affairs to see it politicised. ...

col 1385 The more memorials we build, it seems, the more anti-Semitism rises. We need

to think afresh about the causes of this hatred. ...

Lord Wasserman (Conservative): ... We will never forget or forgive those responsible for the Holocaust, and we will remember them not only by building memorials to their victims and learning centres to tell the story of their atrocities, but by ensuring that no one ever benefits from their activities, even when these benefits are enjoyed by the public at large through national and local galleries and museums around the world. ...

col 1387 **Lord Polak (Conservative):** ... there is a specific biblical imperative of returning lost articles with no time limit. Putting a time limit on the delivery of justice because it may be difficult to provide relevant evidence to prove claims is not, I maintain, a good argument for maintaining the sunset clause. ...

Last week was Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day in the Hebrew calendar. As it is every year, it was commemorated at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. I noted the speech of Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel. He spoke out about the heroism of the many people who saved others in that dark, dark time in history. However, he also spoke about the shooting in the Chabad synagogue in San Diego and the shameful anti-Semitic cartoon published two days earlier in the *New York Times*. Noble Lords who have visited Yad Vashem will no doubt recall displays in the early section of the museum of, sadly, very similar cartoons from the 1930s. We are in danger of watching history repeat itself, which is why we should not put time limits on the ability to seek justice. ...

col 1388 ... the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre next door will act as a constant reminder of the unique responsibilities of politicians. Some argue that the structure could encourage more anti-Semitism, but it is precisely that argument that proves we need it urgently. ...

col 1390 **Baroness Ludford (Liberal Democrat):** ... [I] quote from Madeleine Albright, all too relevant today as we see examples of hate and hostility, including anti-Semitism, worryingly on the rise: "I think of the blood that is in my family veins. Does it matter what kind of blood it is? It shouldn't; it is just blood that does its job. But it mattered to Hitler and that matters to us all; because that is why 6 million Jews died".

As the Holocaust cries out to us, we must never allow distinctions among the peoples of the world to obscure the common humanity that binds us all as people. Restitution of Holocaust-era assets is about much more than gold, art and insurance. It is about remembering that no one's blood is less or more precious than our own. ...

col 1391 **Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Labour):** ... Alongside the stories of the great works of art and treasures, which command their own logic and evidence, we must not forget that what particularly violates those from whom objects are taken is the loss of the personal items, the things that matter for everyday living, family memories and things like that. It is the great and the small. It is the mere act of violation that we need to do whatever we can to offer restitution to. ...

col 1392 **Viscount Younger of Leckie (Conservative):** ... The widespread and systematic seizure of cultural property in territories occupied by, or under the control of, the Nazis and their allies has, for over half a century, been recognised in international declarations as warranting particular recognition and deserving special treatment. The scale of forced transfer of cultural property under the Nazi regime was unprecedented. ... Most of what was taken were paintings of the type owned by successful, but perhaps not extremely wealthy, families, domestic silver and household artefacts, and books and religious items. We hear a lot about Old Masters and similar prized works of art seized from the wealthiest collectors or most successful dealers, but in fact they make up only a fraction of the numerically more significant theft. ...

col 1394 Since the Act was introduced, five cultural objects have been returned under the legislation. It represents a major change in the way that claims for items in national collections are resolved, and allows the families of those who were unfairly deprived of their property to have it returned. It is not difficult to imagine how important that can be for

the families ... There is no comfort that can be given for the loss of family members and the knowledge of their suffering, but the return of personal possessions, of which artwork is just one form, can offer some small connection and personal bond with those who perished. ...

col 1395 At the time of the 2009 Act, the Government considered that a time limit of 10 years would be a reasonable one for people to come forward with claims and for museums to have made significant progress in carrying out provenance research on works with gaps in their history during the Nazi era. ... The Government made it clear at an international spoliation conference held in London in September 2017 that it remains an absolute imperative to correct the wrongs that took place during the Nazi era when it comes to cultural objects lost in such circumstances. This principle is not affected by the passage of time; arguably, the need is strengthened as memories start to fade. ...

col 1396 It was thought that that would be a reasonable time for people to come forward with claims. Clearly, that was not the case, and I am pleased again to emphasise that we have made the time period indefinite. ...

I conclude by making a few comments about the Holocaust Memorial ... the UK Holocaust Memorial will be dedicated to the 6 million Jewish men, women and children murdered in the Holocaust, and all other victims of the Nazis and their collaborators. It will honour and remember all victims and survivors of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides, and educate future generations on the importance of fighting prejudice and persecution in all its forms. ...

col 1397 **Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury:** ... I am grateful to everyone who spoke in the debate, and now just want to make an appeal to my noble friend the Chief Whip. The Bill has to be passed this Session, or the legislation falls. It is very important that we have time. ...

Bill read a second time and committed to a Committee of the Whole House.

To read the full transcript see

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-05-09/debates/7215AD06-5DFE-4F6C-85F3-C7FDE98F7382/Holocaust\(ReturnOfCulturalObjects\)\(Amendment\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-05-09/debates/7215AD06-5DFE-4F6C-85F3-C7FDE98F7382/Holocaust(ReturnOfCulturalObjects)(Amendment)Bill)

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

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

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

Second Reading, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-05-09/debates/7215AD06-5DFE-4F6C-85F3-C7FDE98F7382/Holocaust\(ReturnOfCulturalObjects\)\(Amendment\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-05-09/debates/7215AD06-5DFE-4F6C-85F3-C7FDE98F7382/Holocaust(ReturnOfCulturalObjects)(Amendment)Bill)

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>

TOP

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>

TOP

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