

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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UK Parliament Petition

Non-stun slaughter

[P002456] *The petition of residents of the UK*, Declares that animals killed by having their throats cut while fully conscious is unacceptable; further that animals should not be made to suffer such profound trauma in the name of religion; further that this method of slaughter runs counter to any belief in compassion and mercy; further that animals should be stunned before they are slaughtered; further that, Shechita slaughter does not allow animals to be stunned before they are slaughtered; further that, when the Holy Prophet was alive, modern stunning methods did not exist; further that the Food Research Institute states that killing an animal before it is bled out by high voltage electrical stunning does not affect the amount of blood from the carcass; and further that this petition relates to e-petition 131591.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons to debate non-stun slaughter. And the petitioners remain, etc.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-05-22/debates/19052229000011/Non-StunSlaughter>

The e-petition referred to above can be read at

<https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/131591>

Scottish Parliament Oral Answer

First Minister's Questions: Places of Worship (Attacks)

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Conservative): The First Minister will be aware that, a few nights ago, the outside of Elgin mosque was daubed with a swastika and offensive language. It is not the first time that an attack of that nature has been brought to Parliament's attention, and I fear that it will not be the last. Will the First Minister join me and politicians across all parties in Moray in condemning that attempt to intimidate the Muslim community in Elgin? Will she also give a clear commitment that the Scottish Government will ensure that resources are in place to protect Scotland's places of worship, and that when they are targeted in such a manner, no stone will be left

unturned in bringing to justice those who are responsible?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I whole-heartedly endorse Jamie Halcro Johnston's comments. I know that Richard Lochhead, as the local MSP for Elgin, has already expressed similar sentiments. I unreservedly condemn every attack on a mosque, or on any other church or place of worship.

I suspect that my constituency has more mosques than any other constituency in the country, so I know the impact that an attack on or threat to any mosque has on our Muslim community. That, of course, applies to everybody of any faith and at any place of worship.

This morning, I had the honour of addressing the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. All Scotland's faiths have a proud record of coming together and standing against intolerance, prejudice and bigotry, and we should all stand shoulder to shoulder with them as they do so.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12117&i=109600#ScotParlOR>

Welsh Government

Together for Health Organ Donation Annual Report 2018

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/organ-donation-annual-report-2018.pdf>

Church of Scotland

Following debate, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland approved a motion expressing concern at the high level of antisemitic incidents in the UK, and adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The transcript of the debate is not available online, but a video is available (the relevant debate starts at 2hrs 16 mins).

https://stream1.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/general_assembly/archive/report_and_supplementary_report_of_the_church_and_society_council

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

Gaza: Israel

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15693] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment, if any, they have made of the ecological damage caused by the recent escalation of hostilities in Gaza.

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/2019-05-13/HL15693/>

Gaza: Israel

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15694] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the damage caused by the recent escalation of hostilities in Gaza, in particular to public facilities and services, and electricity networks; and what assessment they have made of the impact of the loss of such facilities, services, and networks on the civilian population in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is gravely concerned by the recent escalation

of hostilities in Gaza. We wholly condemn rocket fire by Hamas and other militants. The then acting Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, the Rt Hon. Mark Field MP, spoke to UN MEPP Coordinator Mladenov on 8 May where he welcomed the Egyptian and UN brokered ceasefire. We urge the parties to make progress towards a long-term agreement to ensure a durable solution for Gaza. We are concerned by damage to infrastructure in Gaza and the impact this has on the civilian population. The UK is supporting up to 1 million Gazans by addressing critical water and sanitation needs through £2 million to UNICEF. We have also announced £2 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross for medicines and surgical supplies.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-05-13/HL15694/>

Israeli Settlements: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15695] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the government of Israel about the number of attacks on Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers including hit and run offences.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We welcome the efforts of Israeli authorities to address settler violence, and urge them to thoroughly investigate every instance and bring those responsible to justice. We have also stressed the importance of the Israel security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population. While the vast majority of settlers do not engage in attacks, there are pockets of extremely worrying violence.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-05-13/HL15695/>

Israeli Settlements: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15696] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about reports that Israeli settlers have poisoned water supplies used by shepherds in the West Bank; and what steps they intend to take to protect those shepherds from attacks by settlers.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We continue to raise with our Israeli counterparts our concerns about the humanitarian and environmental impact of the damage to water sources and the destruction of Palestinian agricultural land that has been caused by settlement-related activity. We continue to condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians and stress the importance of the Israel security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-05-13/HL15696/>

Gaza: Fisheries

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15697] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the restrictions faced by fishermen in Gaza; what assessment they have made of the (1) amount, and (2) communication, of changes to the size and location of the fishing zone in Gaza; and what steps they intend to take to protect fishermen in Gaza from attacks by Israeli forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We regularly raise with the Government of Israel the urgent need to ease access and movement restrictions on Gaza, including fishing limits. This would help to restore the fishing industry. Our understanding is that on 9 May, Israel increased the permitted fishing zone off the coast of Gaza to twelve nautical miles. The UK would like to see a permanent increase in the size of the fishing zone off the coast of Gaza, in line with the limit of twenty nautical miles

stipulated in the Oslo accords.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-05-13/HL15697/>

Gaza: Israel

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15698] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 8 May (HL15420), what steps they intend to take to ensure that books, particularly educational books, are not prevented by Israel from reaching those living in the Gaza Strip.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not raised this specific issue with the Israeli authorities. But we continue to stress to the Israeli authorities the damage that their restrictions are doing to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza and regularly call for them to ease restrictions further. We also support education through our funding to the Palestinian Authority and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-05-13/HL15698/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-04-29/HL15420/>

Gaza: Animals

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15748] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the loss of (1) farm, and (2) pack, animals as a result of the blockade and the escalation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip on (a) food supply, and (b) those in Gaza who rely on such animals for their livelihoods.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Whilst we have not made any assessment on this specific issue, we continue to stress to the Israeli authorities the damage that their restrictions are doing to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza and regularly call for them to ease restrictions further.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-05-14/HL15748/>

Israeli Settlements: Palestinians

Lord Judd (Labour) [HL15769] To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they have taken to assess any negative impact on Palestinians of the policies of business operating in, or with, Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We routinely update our guidance to British businesses on the Overseas Business Risk website. We advise British businesses to bear in mind the British Government's view on the illegality of settlements under international law when considering their investments and activities in the region. It has long been our position that Israeli settlement activity is illegal and undermines the viability of two states for two peoples. Ultimately it is the decision of an individual or company whether to operate in settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but the British Government neither encourages nor offers support to such activity.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-05-15/HL15769/>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Encouraging all parties to work together to achieve peace for Israelis and Palestinians: Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council Debate on the Middle East Peace Process

... Since the Council's last monthly meeting on this issue, we have witnessed the worst violence in Gaza since 2014. The United Kingdom was gravely concerned by this escalation, during which both Israeli and Palestinian civilians were killed. We utterly condemn all rocket fire from Gaza towards Israel, and we are clear that it must stop. It is ultimately the ongoing decision by Hamas, to embrace violence and reject the Quartet Principles, which lies at the heart of the Gazan tragedy.

The United Kingdom's support for Israel's right to self-defence is unequivocal. But we are equally clear that Israel's action must be proportionate, and must guard against civilian casualties. ...

As well as creating fear amongst the Israeli and Palestinian populations, and damaging the prospects for peace, this hopeless cycle of violence further undermines the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Against this backdrop, UNRWA is a necessary humanitarian and stabilising force in the region, providing vital services to millions of Palestinian refugees. The United Kingdom remains a firmly committed supporter of UNRWA, and of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, and we will do everything we can to maintain continuity of essential services at this time. ...

... the United Kingdom remains worried about the impact of Israel's decision to withhold tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli decision will have significant consequences for stability and security; it is impacting ordinary Palestinians and it risks exacerbating the already dire humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza.

The United Kingdom continues to have concerns about aspects of the Palestinian system of payments to detainees. We encourage the reform of the system to be needs-based, transparent and more affordable. But this is not a justification for withholding agreed tax revenues.

A stable Palestinian Authority is in the interest of both Palestinians and Israelis. This is the PA's money. We encourage Israel to reconsider this decision or find other ways to counteract the risks, while abiding by all signed agreements. Given the risk of fiscal collapse is very real, we also urge the PA to accept the remaining tax revenues. ...

... the United Kingdom continues to believe that substantive peace talks between the parties – leading to a negotiated two-state solution based on 1967 lines, with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as a shared capital and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees – is the way to end the Arab-Israeli conflict; provide security and justice to both Israelis and Palestinians; and preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/encouraging-all-parties-to-achieve-peace-for-israelis-and-palestinians>

United Nations

Security Council Members Express Alarm over Recent Escalation of Violence in Gaza, Funding Shortfall Affecting Agency for Palestine Refugees

Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ...

reported that the most intense fighting since 2014 between Israeli forces and militants belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad took place in Gaza just a few weeks ago. Recalling that thousands of Palestinians participated in the weekly demonstrations at the Gaza

perimeter fence, he said that over the next 48 hours, 650 rockets fired from Gaza killed four Israeli civilians. The Israeli Defense Forces hit more than 300 militant targets in Gaza, reportedly killing 25 Palestinians. ...

While Gaza continues to command significant attention, the situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is of growing concern, he reported, stressing that Israel's construction of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal under international law and remains a substantial obstacle to peace. ...

... he said the recent escalation in Gaza demonstrated once again the urgent need to solidify and expand the existing understandings between Israel and Hamas. The United Nations and its partners have tried yet again to mitigate the impact of the crisis, he noted, but its efforts will fail without progress on resolving the Palestinian divide, lifting the Gaza closures and charting a course towards a two-State solution based on long-standing international parameters, including relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements. ...

Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) [said] Some 42 countries and institutions increased their contributions to erase an unprecedented deficit of \$446 million ...

He went on to report that thousands of young people have been wounded and hundreds killed since March 2018, including 14 boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years who were students in UNRWA schools. "I reiterate here my call for respect for international humanitarian law and my condemnation of the targeting of civilians," he said. "This includes rocket firing from Gaza that has led to civilian loss of life and injuries in Israel." ... Turning to the West Bank, he said Palestine refugees living there are confronted with multiple consequences of the ongoing occupation, such as the demolition of homes and evictions. Live ammunition is fired during some military incursions, at times resulting in fatalities, he added. ...

Jason Greenblatt (United States), while noting that all innocent victims — both Israeli and Palestinian — deserve better, emphasized: "It is simply unacceptable that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad continue to target Israeli hospitals and schools" and use civilians, including children, as human shields. There will be no end to this suffering until Hamas renounces terrorism and their vow to destroy Israel ... The United States will always stand with Israel and support its fight against terror, he vowed ...

He said the UNRWA business model has failed the Palestinian people because it is tied to a growing community of beneficiaries. For its part, the United States will no longer commit to funding this model since it cannot help the Palestinians plan their lives ...

"Palestinians have been held hostage to General Assembly resolutions," he added. Recalling that a similar number of Jewish refugees expelled from Arab lands also required assistance, he noted that they were not hostage to politics, but rather, were able to achieve a brighter future for their children. He asked: "Do the Palestinians not deserve the same?" ...

François Delattre (France) expressed concern over the new violence in Gaza, condemning attacks against Israel and expressing support for that country's right to defend itself. ...

Christoph Heusgen (Germany) expressed support for Israel's right to exist and to defend itself, condemning all attacks against that country and emphasizing that his country will speak up whenever those rights are compromised. ...

Jonathan Guy Allen (United Kingdom), expressing grave concern over the escalation of violence, utterly condemned all rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. He also said that although it is the ultimate decision of Hamas to embrace rocket fire in violation of the Quartet agreement, Israel's actions must also be proportionate. ... *[see above for more detail of this speech]*

Vassily A. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) [said] A just solution to the Palestinian problem will be fundamentally important to improving the situation in the region ...

He went on to underline that Israeli settlement activities and demolition of Palestinian properties must end. Similarly, all terrorist attacks must end and unity among the Palestinian ranks must be restored. ... Palestinians will not renounce their call for statehood no matter what they are promised, he said, emphasizing the critical need for practical measures to get the peace process out of this dangerous impasse. ...

Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, Deputy Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, rejected attempts to characterize UNRWA as part of the problem, saying the Agency has done extraordinary work to alleviate the plight of millions of Palestinians, thereby contributing to regional stability. ... [Israel's] contempt and intransigence have only been emboldened further by recent decisions by the United States disregarding, contradicting and completely undermining the pillars of that consensus. She went on to recall that the Palestinian people and leadership made the most painful compromise more than 30 years ago in accepting the two-State formula and declaring the independence of their state on only 22 per cent of their historic homeland.

She went on to describing that as the most generous offer of peace ever made, pointing out, however, that Israel has rejected it over and over again. Today's one-State apartheid reality is that country's own doing, she said. The Palestinian leadership cannot accept a plan merely in order to improve the lives of Palestinians while the illegal occupation continues, she emphasized. Nor have Palestinians endured decades of suffering and waited nearly a century for freedom only to resign themselves to "limited autonomy". ...

Danny Ben Yosef Danon (Israel) said UNRWA has been political since its inception, adding that no other refugee population — not that of Syria or Yemen — has such an agency serving it. Every other refugee in the world is under the jurisdiction of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), he pointed out. UNRWA grants special refugee status that is passed down through generations, he said, adding that the vast majority of beneficiaries do not meet the criteria required of other refugees around the world.

... 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza who have never crossed an international border — which is required to be considered a refugee — are deemed refugees, he noted. "Why is a Palestinian born in Ramallah and who has lived there his entire life considered a refugee?" he asked. ...

Citing reports of a close relationship between UNRWA employees and the Hamas leadership, he said the Agency's schools have served as terrorist training camps ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/SC13820.doc.htm>

Church of Scotland

Following debate, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland approved the *Strategic Review: Church of Scotland in Israel and Palestine* presented by the World Mission Council. The transcript of the debate is not available online, but a video is available at https://stream1.churchofscotland.org.uk/about_us/general_assembly/archive/special_report_of_the_israel_and_palestine_review_group

and the report can be read starting at section 10 (p147 in the pdf) of

<https://ga.churchofscotland.org.uk/download/publications/2019-assembly-reports-blue-book-pdf.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

Scottish Human Rights Commission Draft Strategic Plan (closing date 28 June 2019)

<http://www.scottishhumanrights.com/media/1860/strategic-plan-consultation-vfinal-eh.docx>

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