



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Prime Minister's Questions

George Eustice (Conservative): As long ago as 1875, this country became the first in the world to require animals to be stunned prior to slaughter, yet the latest evidence from the Food Standards Agency is that 25% of all sheep slaughtered last year were unstunned following the use of a religious derogation. Religious slaughter is a contentious issue and a matter of personal conscience and religious conviction for many. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there should be a free vote on the Floor of the House on the issue?

The Prime Minister: I understand that my hon. Friend had a Westminster Hall debate yesterday on this issue, which raises a number of emotions and concerns across the House. We have upheld the right of religious slaughter, but this Government, as my hon. Friend will know full well, are taking steps to ensure that we monitor what happens in abattoirs through the introduction of CCTV.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-07-03/debates/5A86E5BB-2661-4F48-B38C-F33FDCF84499/Engagements#contribution-3D9B98B0-5E1B-4CF3-81B6-0E3A55FB4BF7>

House of Commons Written Answer

Universities: Antisemitism

Thangam Debonnaire (Labour) [269079] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what monitoring is taking place on university campuses to ensure compliance with the International Holocaust Remembrance Association definition of anti-semitism.

Reply from Chris Skidmore: There is no place in our society, including within higher education, for hatred or any form of discrimination or racism, such as antisemitism. This is why I have called on higher education providers to accept the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism.

Higher education providers are autonomous organisations, responsible for the

management of their own internal affairs. They should discharge their responsibilities fully and have robust policies and procedures in place to comply with the law, and to investigate and swiftly address all hate crime, including any antisemitic incidents that are reported.

On 16 May 2019, I wrote to all higher education providers to urge them to consider adopting the IHRA definition and set out my view that this is a useful tool which will help front-line services better understand and recognise instances of antisemitism. The government believes that adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism sends a clear message that antisemitic behaviour will not be tolerated, and that any instances of antisemitism will be taken very seriously.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-06-25/269079/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Sharia Law: Marriages

Baroness Cox (Crossbench): To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made in implementing the recommendations of the independent review into the application of sharia law in England and Wales published in February 2018 (Cm 9560), in order to protect Muslim women, and what assessment they have made of Resolution 2253 (2019) by the Council of Europe that all Islamic marriages should also be registered as civil marriages.

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Lord Keen of Elie): My Lords, further work on the issues raised began in the spring, as announced in the Integrated Communities Action Plan. This work will explore reform possibilities in relation to the issue that some people may marry in a way that does not create a legally recognised marriage. This exploration will be conducted independently of the wider Law Commission review of marriage ceremony law.

Baroness Cox: My Lords, in thanking the Minister for his reply, I ask whether he is aware that my Question is almost identical to the one I asked on 28 February. I have had no response, nor seen any evidence of progress on this crucial issue, which causes such suffering to Muslim women through the application of sharia law. Many come to me desperate, destitute and even suicidal, with no rights following asymmetrical divorce inflicted by their husbands, or trapped in unhappy polygamous marriages. The recommendations of the sharia law review and the message from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe are totally consistent with the objectives of my Private Member's Bill, which requires all religious marriages to be registered, thereby giving women the rights they so urgently need. Therefore, I ask the Minister for an assurance that the legislation will be introduced with great urgency, as so many women are suffering in ways that would make the suffragettes turn in their graves.

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, we understand and recognise that there is a very real issue here, but it is more of a social issue than a legal one. I cannot accept that the proposed way forward set out by the noble Baroness in her Private Member's Bill is appropriate. Her proposals would effectively deregulate marriage ceremony law and undermine the safeguards in it, including those relating to sham and forced marriages.

Baroness Manzoor (Conservative): I disagree with my noble friend the Minister. It is not a social issue, but a legal one. Therefore, I entirely agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, that this needs to be looked at urgently. We can have a register that allows imams to register nikah ceremonies easily. We need to do this as quickly as possible.

Lord Keen of Elie: My noble friend is perfectly entitled to disagree with me, and I in turn disagree with her. Let us be clear on what the position is, because some of

this proceeds on a misapprehension. It is perfectly possible to perform a lawful marriage in England and Wales under sharia law provided that the relevant mosque has been identified and registered by the registrars as a place for the performance of that ceremony, and a person has been identified by the registrars as suitable to be present for that ceremony. The law of England and Wales has then to be adhered to. Sharia law is not the law of England and Wales; it has no standing. Our national marriage law prevails in these matters. I reiterate: we understand and appreciate that there is a social issue here, because many are not aware of the true position of our law in respect of marriage. Indeed, many are not prepared to adhere to that in circumstances where one or other party may be ignorant of their true position and its consequences.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, the Council of Europe, referred to in the Question from the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, is very clear that where human rights are concerned there is no room for cultural exceptions. The independent review, commissioned by the Government in 2016, is also clear on its main recommendation that Muslim women undergoing Islamic marriage must be protected by British civil law. Too many vulnerable women are suffering and will suffer until the Government pull their finger out and implement this recommendation.

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, with great respect, some of what has been said by the Council of Europe in its Resolution 2253 does not reflect the true position of marriage law in England and Wales. In particular, the reference to civilly registering a marriage is inept. It does not reflect the true position of our law in England and Wales. Civil registration per se is not a route to a lawful marriage.

Lord Desai (Labour): My Lords, in the present circumstances, what is the position of triple talaq? Is it still possible for a Muslim man to divorce his wife just by saying, “Talaq, talaq, talaq”? Is the Minister aware that in India a Bill is before the two Houses of Parliament to reform the triple talaq Act? Will Her Majesty’s Government follow that example?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, divorce in England and Wales is determined by the national law. It is not determined by religious observance or religious laws. Therefore, it will be necessary for a party seeking a divorce from a lawful marriage made in England and Wales to proceed under our national law. We appreciate that there are social difficulties regarding some religious groups in circumstances where a person might believe that they have been divorced under religious provisions, whether of the type the noble Lord just referred to, under sharia law, or indeed sometimes regarding the get in the context of the Jewish religion.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench): Does the Minister agree that culture should never trump human rights and that all citizens of this country should enjoy equal protection under the law?

Lord Keen of Elie: It is essential that all citizens have equal protection under the law. It is also important that they are treated equally under the law.

Lord Garel-Jones (Conservative): Does my noble friend agree that it is perhaps a little misleading to refer to sharia rules as law? All religions have a perfect right to set out the regulations of their faith, but is it not wrong to refer to those regulations as law? With the exception of the Church of England’s ecclesiastical and religious regulations, they are subject to UK law. Consequently, does my noble friend agree that if sharia regulations—for example, on the treatment of women—conflict with UK law, then UK law, being sovereign, overrides these regulations?

Lord Keen of Elie: My noble friend is absolutely right. Clearly, national law must be adhered to. I do not take exception to the reference to religious law, or sharia, in a social context. There are parties who wish to adhere to that because of their religious beliefs, but they must understand that it is subject to the law of the land, and that sharia is not the law of the land and has no standing as such.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-07-04/debates/942B3D60-0C64-412A-9710-4967D39CFDB6/ShariaLawMarriages>

The Independent Review referred to above can be read at
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

The Council of Europe Resolution referred to above can be read at
<https://tinyurl.com/y6drgl7v>

The Question referred to above can be read at
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2019-02-28/debates/9E6C7E1B-4462-47F4-A769-2546C5524403/IslamicCeremonyCivilMarriageRegistration>

House of Commons Library

General debate on changes to Tier 5 Religious Worker Visas

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2019-0178/CDP-2019-0178.pdf>

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Holocaust

House of Commons Oral Answer

Prime Minister's Questions

Q4. Vernon Coaker (Labour): Eve Leadbeater, a constituent of mine, and Lord Dubs arrived on the Kindertransport 80 years ago this week. Is it not important that we learn from history? Three years after Lord Dubs's amendment to the Immigration Act 2016 gave 480 places to child refugees, only 220 of the places have been filled. Is it not important for the thousands upon thousands of child refugees in camps across Europe and the middle east that we honour that pledge and allow 1,000 child refugees to come into our country each year for the next 10 years, so that we can turn the rhetoric, the crying, the care and the compassion for those child refugees into a public policy that actually meets their needs and does something about their suffering? [911712]

The Prime Minister: I do not know about the hon. Gentleman's constituent, but I know that Lord Dubs came here on the Kindertransport organised by my late constituent, Sir Nicholas Winton. We as a country can be proud of everything we have done to help refugees and other vulnerable children who are affected by conflict, violence and instability. Since the start of 2010, we have provided asylum or an alternative form of protection to more than 34,600 children, and we have granted family reunion visas to an additional 26,000.

We are determined to continue these efforts. We have introduced a new form of leave exclusively for children brought to the UK from the Calais camps, so that they can continue to rebuild their lives with families in the UK. That Calais leave will grant those who qualify the right to study, to work, to access public funds and healthcare and to apply for settlement after 10 years. We have a proud record of helping refugees, and we will continue with that proud record.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-07-03/debates/5A86E5BB-2661-4F48-B38C-F33FDCF84499/Engagements#contribution-8426985E-7EE5-42E3-9FCB-9067EE9E3115>

House of Commons Written Answers

National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Learning Service: Pupils

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [269678] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that pupils are aware of the non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Nick Gibb: The Department is fully committed to Holocaust education. Every young person should learn about the Holocaust and the lessons it teaches us today. The curriculum gives teachers and schools the freedom to decide how to teach the subject and what resources to use to support an understanding of the Holocaust. The Department further supports pupils' and teachers' understanding of the Holocaust by providing funding, such as £2,126,437 in 2019-20 for the Holocaust Educational Trust's Lessons from Auschwitz project. The Department also provides funding to the UCL Institute of Education's Centre for Holocaust Education, in 2019-20 £500,000 will be match funded by the Pears foundation. Additionally, in October 2018, the Chancellor announced £1.7 million for a new programme to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen by British troops.

A wide array of resources are available. Both Lessons from Auschwitz and the knowledge and training provided by the Centre for Holocaust Education include information and resources to support an understanding of the Holocaust and the Nazi's persecution of other non-Jewish groups, from the genocide of the Roma to the murder of people who were, for example, gay, disabled, Communist, trade-unionist, Polish or Soviet prisoners of war.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-06-26/269678/>

Victoria Tower Gardens

Edward Leigh (Conservative) [270276] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans the Government has for the management of Victoria Tower Gardens after the construction of the proposed Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre; and what discussions he has had with Royal Parks on that matter.

Mims Davies: Officials continue to have discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and The Royal Parks on this issue.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-06-27/270276/>

Victoria Tower Gardens

Edward Leigh (Conservative) [270277] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what arrangements he plans to put in place in Victoria Tower Gardens for periods in winter when the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre is open but the rest of the gardens are closed at dusk.

Mims Davies: The opening hours of the proposed Holocaust Memorial have not yet been determined.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-06-27/270277/>

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Foreign Affairs

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Briefing: People of Faith: Persecution in the 21st Century

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2019-0087/LLN-2019-0087.pdf>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Andrew Murrison: Great to meet with the @BoardofDeputies this afternoon - a vital voice for the British Jewish community. I look forward to working together and making progress on a whole range of issues.

<https://twitter.com/AWMurrison/status/1146455395558481921>

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Other Relevant Information

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Young Jews face harassment in Europe, but nevertheless express their Jewish identity

Many young Jewish Europeans face antisemitic harassment in Europe, but are also very resilient as they clearly express their Jewish identity, finds a report published today by the European Commission and FRA. Rising hate speech and intolerance towards them shows the urgent need for continued concerted efforts to adequately address society's longstanding and persistent hostility towards Jews.

Young Jewish Europeans, although worryingly more exposed to antisemitism than their elders, declare largely having a strong Jewish identity, as the 'Young Jews in contemporary Europe' report shows. It uses data stemming from the more than 2,700 young Jewish Europeans polled for the 2018 FRA survey 'Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism'. The report's results also show that young Jewish Europeans are mindful of general changes in society regarding the rise of hate speech and intolerance, and feel generally unsafe in Europe.

EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra Jourová says, "*Young Jewish Europeans are very attached to their Jewish identity. I am saddened that they fear for their security in Europe, do not dare to wear a kippah and some even consider emigrating. ...*"

Based on FRA's survey data, the report shows that:

- 81% of the young Jewish Europeans declared the strength of their Jewish identity to be high;
- Four in five of the young Jewish Europeans say that antisemitism is a problem in their countries and believe it to have increased over the past five years;
- 81% of young Jewish Europeans believe racism is a problem in their countries and 74% perceive an increase specifically of anti-Muslim hatred;
- Remembering the Holocaust remains the most important factor to determine the Jewish identity of young Jewish Europeans (95%);
- While the importance of 'supporting Israel' in the identities of young Jewish Europeans is less significant than for their elders, 85% of young Jewish Europeans report that people in their countries accuse or blame them for anything done by the

- Israeli government at least 'occasionally';
- 44% of young Jewish Europeans experienced antisemitic harassment, which is 12% higher than their elders. 80% of young victims do not report harassment to the police or any other authority;
 - 45% of young Jewish Europeans choose not to wear, carry or display distinguishable Jewish items in public because they are concerned about their safety.
 - 41% have considered emigrating because they did not feel safe living there as a Jewish person;
 - 48% feel that their government is adequately protecting them and only 17% consider that they are combating antisemitism effectively. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://fra.europa.eu/en/press-release/2019/young-jews-age-old-hatred>

Young Jewish Europeans: perceptions and experiences of antisemitism

https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-young-jewish-europeans_en.pdf

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill

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

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

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

Royal Assent

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-07-04/debates/28ED4FB9-9C74-4840-A4EF-50073F9CC14D/RoyalAssent>

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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

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>

Regulation of pre-paid funeral plans (closing date 25 August 2019)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulation-of-pre-paid-funeral-plans-consultation-on-a-policy-proposal>

Islamophobia in Scotland (closing date 26 August 2019)

<https://forms.ncl.ac.uk/view.php?id=13027>

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