

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

col 1366 **Valerie Vaz (Labour):** ... Black History Month reminds us of the contribution our parents made. They had to face terrible racism when they first came here. Racism is pernicious, whether blatant or unconscious. ...

The Leader of the House of Commons (Jacob Rees-Mogg): ... I absolutely endorse what the hon. said about racism being wrong. It is not only wrong, it is evil, and it something that we should all wish to oppose and root out. It should be a sadness to all of us that the Labour party is the second party—after the British National party—to be investigated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission for its anti-Semitism. That should be not something that we use as a party-political point, but something that is bad news in terms of the body politic generally. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-10-03/debates/C445848D-07F5-4A9C-85E2-E147A153E1A3/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-CBA0D470-D54D-47FD-89AE-B1428983B4FB>

Online Abuse

4. **Vicky Ford (Conservative):** What recent steps her Department has taken to tackle online abuse. [912537]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): Online abuse is unacceptable and far too prevalent. Close to half of UK adults say that they have seen hateful content in the last year alone. ... we published the online harms White Paper in April. It tackles legal but harmful and also illegal content, including hate crime, harassment and cyber-stalking. We will seek to bring that forward.

Vicky Ford: Recent events have highlighted the high levels of online abuse faced by Members of Parliament, especially women. The threats of violence and intimidation towards those in public life undermine democracy and cannot be acceptable. The Jo Cox Foundation is calling on all political parties to commit to a joint standard of conduct to uphold the highest standards in public life. Does my hon. Friend the Minister support that initiative?

Matt Warman: I pay tribute not only to my hon. Friend for the work that she has done in this area, but to the foundation for the work that it is doing. She is right that we should seek to do all we can, cross-party, not only to discourage the abuse that she speaks of, but to encourage people to come into politics. That will not happen so long as the level of abuse is as it is, and we will look closely the proposals, as well as those others that have come forward. ...

Peter Bone (Conservative): The Minister says that the abuse is unacceptable, and he is right. Some time ago, there was a picture on the internet of my young son being executed, but nobody seems to be able to do anything whatever about this. We say it is unacceptable, but we do not seem to be able to do anything. What are the Minister's ideas?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend is completely right that, as things stand, we are not able to take the action that we should be able to. It is also important to say that social media companies themselves have also not taken the action is required of them in a civilised society. The online harms White Paper and its journey into legislation will be a crucial method of tackling this, but it is not the only one, and I would like to continue to work with the social media companies to bring forward much more rapid progress. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-10-03/debates/32E3891F-1F1F-4DD4-8CEE-020AA9548FA7/OnlineAbuse>

The White Paper referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793360/Online_Harms_White_Paper.pdf

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House of Commons Written Answer

Hacker House: Grants

Tom Watson (Labour) [292162] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether the application from Hacker House for funding from the Cyber Security Immediate Impact Fund mentioned a trade mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in November 2015.

Matt Warman: I have instructed my officials to commission a review that will look into Hacker House's application for grant funding awarded under the Cyber Skills Immediate Impact Fund (CSIIIF). Subject to any legal restrictions (such as data protection laws and duties to protect commercial or confidential information), we will make available the relevant information regarding the decision making process by 31 October 2019 at the latest.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-09-30/292162/>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

In dialogue with Israel, experts of Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights say human rights obligations extend to territories under the country's effective control

... **Aviva Raz Schechter, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations**

Office at Geneva, said the report [the fourth periodic report of Israel] was the product of a broad collaborative effort by many Israeli Government Ministries and bodies, including participation with civil society organizations.

In the legislative area, the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, had adopted many new laws regarding human rights ...

In the judicial realm, Israeli courts continued to play a crucial role in the promotion of human rights. A noteworthy example was the landmark decision of December 2018, in which the High Court of Justice dismissed a petition regarding the illegal high recruitment fees that foreign workers were required to pay in order to work in Israel.

Moreover, the serious manner in which the State of Israel considered human rights matters was evident from its choice to establish three new national human rights institutions in recent years, in addition to the existing mechanisms, namely the Children's and Youth Complaints Commission for Out-of-home Placed Children, the Early Childhood Council, and the Unit for the Coordination of the Fight against Racism. ...

Since the last presentation of Israel before this Committee, many positive developments had been made in order to advance and promote the Arab population, including Druze, Circassian and Bedouin populations. A comprehensive five-year plan addressing the development of the Bedouin population had been approved following extensive work carried out by the Bedouin Authority. It included a budget of 3 billion new Israeli shekels (833.4 million dollars) for the benefit of the Bedouin population. ...

Since the last periodic review in November 2011, Israel had continued to face numerous challenges, due to the instability in the region and the constant terror attacks by the Hamas terror organization that had been controlling Gaza since 2007. It was unfortunate that since the unilateral disengagement of Israel from Gaza, another opportunity to build bridges and reach a compromise between Palestinians and Israelis had been missed again. It was no less worrying and aggravating that the Palestinians in Gaza were being used by Hamas as human shields, including children, who were also daily subjected to brainwashing and were educated to hate Israel and Israelis. The hostile relations between the Palestinian Authority (Ramallah) and Hamas in Gaza further deteriorated the daily situation of the Palestinians in Gaza.

The Israelis living along the fence with Gaza had been suffering for the last 12 years from the hostilities and terror attacks by Hamas ... Just recently a barrage of 800 rockets had been launched from Gaza during one weekend and if it were not for the Iron Dome anti-missile defence system that Israel had developed to intercept those rockets, there would have been disastrous consequences. ...

Alsan Abashidze, Committee Expert and Rapporteur for Israel ... said there was a chain in links in the common core document that hindered the Committee's access to information and slowed down its work. ... the Committee had asked for data on the Bedouins that was disaggregated by sex, and so on and so forth. That information was still lacking; there were no concrete figures. ...

Mr. Abashidze noted that there were various governmental entities working on human rights. ...

How did the State party, as an occupying power, ensure that the rights of the people living in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights were protected? Israel had to refrain from any action that would infringe on their right to development and it also had to foster such development -- Israel, in that regard had both a positive and a negative obligation.

He asked what steps had been taken to implement equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the State party's laws.

He requested information on the status of the Arabic language. There were fears that the focus on the Hebrew language and Jewish culture would negatively impact on about 20 per cent of the population. ...

Aviva Raz Shechter ... explained that the Government collected precise data related to the socioeconomic situation of Bedouins. The Government considered the Bedouins to be equal to all other citizens. A policy would be put in place to respond to their needs, notably those related to land rights, and allow Bedouins who wished to develop their lands voluntarily to do so.

In 2018, the Knesset adopted by a majority a law, the Basic Law: Israel - Nation State of the Jewish People, which enshrined the character of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people. ...

The official language of Israel was Hebrew. Arabic was granted a special status. The Government's website for ministries was being translated, for instance. It was important to emphasize that this Basic Law: Israel - Nation State of the Jewish People did not derogate from human rights laws. ...

The Government did not seek to obtain information on the West Bank, as the Government deemed it fell outside the scope of the Covenant ... None of the human rights entities currently existing in Israel met to criteria set out in the Paris Principles. But talks on the creation of a national human rights institution were being held. ...

An Expert said that it was a widely applied and recognized principle that a State's human rights obligations also applied to territories under its effective control. Jurisprudence had established that international humanitarian law and human rights law could be applied concurrently. The Covenant did not stipulate that the scope of its application was limited to the territory of the State parties. ...

On the same topic, another Expert said the answer of the delegation had been disappointing in relation to international law. According to articles 55 and 56 of the United Nations Charter, Member States had a responsibility to promote and protect human rights everywhere. If the State of Israel did not have human rights obligations in the occupied Palestinian territories, territories which it was occupying and over which it was exercised effective control, then who did? ...

Israel maintained that the Covenant did not apply to areas that were not subject to its sovereign territory and jurisdiction. ...

Dzidek Kedzia, Committee Expert and Rapporteur for Israel ... asked the delegation to comment on the ways in which the Arab population with disabilities participated in the labour market ...

Bedouins suffered from very high levels of poverty. ...

The Rapporteur asked if the State party had any plans to address the situation of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers who faced a restrictive employment framework following a decision by the High Court. ...

He asked the delegation to provide information on the right to strike; reported violations of the labour rights of inhabitants of the Golan Heights of Syrian origin; the segments of the population excluded from the social security system; and the remedial measures taken or planned to address the fact that 21 per cent of Israel's elderly persons lived below the poverty line. ...

The delegation said that ... More than 120,000 people had participated in governmental employment programmes that sought to equip them with tools to foster their re-integration in the labour market. Women, notably minority women, faced barriers impeding employment. ...

The delegation assured that the right to strike was fully protected in Israel. ... Policies and programmes had also been implemented to promote the labour market's integration of ultraorthodox Jews, including ultraorthodox Jewish women. ...

The unemployment rate amongst Bedouins had dropped from 34 per cent to 11 per cent over the course of five years. For the past four years, a programme had been put in place to foster Bedouins' access through education by providing them with transportation to educational institutions.

The Family First programme on poverty had been implemented in 103 localities. It operated through Israeli clusters, including Bedouin and ultraorthodox authorities. ... It had led to a 58 per cent income increase in targeted households. Almost 50 per cent of the participants in this programme were Arab. ...

Sandra Liebenberg, Committee Expert and Rapporteur for Israel, flagged obstacles to the enjoyment family life created by restrictions on movement between Gaza and the West Bank. ...

The Committee had been told by non-governmental organizations that the Government continued to pursue its goal of relocating Bedouins from what were termed "unrecognized villages" and continued to implement its policy of house demolitions. Why was a strategy not pursued of regularizing and upgrading the current "unrecognized" villages than one of eviction, demolition and relocation? ...

She noted that the criteria to be issued an exit permit from the Gaza Strip on medical grounds was restricted to lifesaving medical treatment. What steps could be taken to review the entire exit permit regulations in line with article 12 of the Covenant? ...

Aviva Raz Shechter ... said there was an armed conflict between Hamas and Israel in Gaza. The Gaza Strip was therefore a hostile zone, and this had obvious ramifications which the Committee should keep in mind.

Hamas exercised de facto control over Gaza. In 2007, the Israeli High Court of Justice had confirmed that the Government had no obligation towards the population of the Gaza Strip. It had ruled that Israel's obligations were limited to allowing and facilitating the entry of humanitarian aid in line with the laws of armed conflict and taking into consideration its rights as a State. ...

Israel was a democratic State, and it was doing its best to provide economic, social and cultural rights to all. ...

The delegation rejected the accusation that Israel had sprayed chemicals in Gaza. Spraying was only done on Israeli soil, with herbicides approved by the relevant governmental authorities. Precautions were taken to minimize their effect.

Turning to the health situation in Gaza, the delegation remarked that, as a general rule, foreigners did not have a right to enter a foreign State. The Government of Israel nevertheless took a calculated risk by letting in people from Gaza that were seeking health treatment, under certain conditions and on the basis of a transparent policy which was available online. Terrorist organizations were exploiting this humanitarian channel. A cancer patient who had been admitted for treatment in Israel was used by a grandson to funnel money to terrorist organizations. There were many more similar cases. ...

In light of the security situation and the violent takeover by Hamas, restrictions on the entry of goods had been put in place. The policy was above and beyond Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law. Indeed, all goods could enter Gaza freely, except those that may pose a threat to the security of Israel. ...

Regrettably, for several years, the Palestinian side had refused to discuss water and sewage related projects. And yet, Israel had met all its obligations in that regard, and had also promoted international projects in the West Bank to improve water and sewage facilities in the area.

Israel did not use house demolitions for reprisal. House demolitions were carefully carried out to thwart terrorism, after a review by the relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Justice. Decisions to carry out house demolitions could be appealed: several such appeals had resulted in reduced or partial demolitions. Furthermore, Israeli courts had reaffirmed the legality of demolitions, in light of activities threatening the security of Israel. ...

On the situation of Bedouins, the delegation said there had been a significant change of approach. The Government considered them as citizens with equal rights; increased budgets were allocated to narrow gaps that persisted in that regard. ...

Preeti Saran, Committee Expert and Rapporteur for Israel, asked why there was such a high and disproportionate rate of dropouts among Bedouin students in comparison to the general public, and such large gaps in the educational achievements between Arab students in comparison to Jewish students.

There was a shortage of school facilities in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Over a third of Palestinian communities did not have primary schools. Children were forced to travel long distances, and attend schools in shacks and temporary structures, without heating or air conditioning. ...

Several government-run schools in Gaza had been damaged and the ban in 2014 on students from Gaza accessing education in the West Bank also had adversely affected their right to education. ...

The annual budget for the High Institute for the Arabic Language was just 1.45 million new Israeli shekels or 402,800 dollars for the year 2019. It appeared to be a modest figure given that the Arabic population of Israel, was about 1.5 million people or around 20 per cent of the total population. ...

What measures were being taken to ensure that Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territories could exercise their right to take part in cultural and religious life, without restrictions other than those that were strictly proportionate to security considerations and were non-discriminatory in their application, in accordance with international humanitarian law? ...

The delegation explained that ... Israel had a deep commitment to the rule of law, and every instance of violence against the Palestinians in the West Bank was dealt with accordingly. ...

Turning to education in the West Bank, the delegation explained that the Palestinian Authority had its own education system, and was responsible for education in the area. ... There were terrorist organizations that used schools for military purposes, such as launching rockets. The Israeli made every effort to avoid attacking such facilities, but in some cases it had been unavoidable.

On the right to cultural and religious life, the delegation said that, in recent years, Israel had gone to great lengths to facilitate the access of Palestinians to religious sites in Israel, when the security situation permitted it.

There had been a steady increase in the number of schools in both the Hebrew and Arabic school systems. There were 681 Arab schools in Israel as of September 2019. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25097&LangID=E>

Fourth periodic report submitted by Israel under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2016

<http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slQ6QSmIBEDzFEovLCuW0fekJcyLVE4h%2fkYmh4jSauwrcgh%2b%2fiDI%2fGijDBJgAXnFLI49EzGTi6xtDrT%2f5hJihR03W%2bA0UUxdL4q5XS1b2aYtLaHvnNkY594OEclhuYI>

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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>

Domestic Abuse Bill

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

Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/112997.aspx>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Welsh Government Strategic Equality Objectives 2020-24 (closing date 19 November 2019)

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2019-09/strategic-equality-objectives-2020-2024-consultation.pdf>

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