

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Hate Crime

Chris Ruane (Labour) [7080] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 28 October 2019 to Question 4283 on Hate Crime, what assessment her Department has made of the effect of the (a) language and tone of public statements made by and (b) the actions of public figures on trends in the level of recorded hate crime.

Victoria Atkins: The Home Office and key partners continue to build understanding of the drivers of hate crime through research and evaluation of hate crime programmes, and consultation with subject matter experts including the Independent Advisory Group and local practitioners. Alongside the Hate Crime Action Plan refresh in October 2018 the Government published a thematic review of the current evidence base – this can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-action-plan-2016>.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-10-29/7080/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-10-23/4283/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Universities: Anti-Semitism

Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): To ask Her Majesty's Government how many universities in England have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism; and what steps they intend to take in respect of those which have not. ...

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, the Government strongly encourage higher education providers to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism. The Universities Minister and the Secretary of State for

Communities and Local Government have, between them, written to providers a total of three times. I can confirm that five providers have informed the Government that they have adopted the definition. As autonomous institutions, the decision rests with individual providers, but the Government will continue to urge and encourage them to adopt this important definition.

Lord Leigh of Hurley: I am sure that my noble friend the Minister will agree it is very disappointing that only five institutions have agreed to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, and that she will join me in encouraging all the Members of this House who serve as chancellors, masters, wardens, principals and fellows of universities to encourage their institutions to adopt that definition. The EHRC recently introduced guidelines on freedom of expression, requiring universities to have a particular code. Does the Minister agree that, if the universities adopted the IHRA definition, that would satisfy the requirements of the code in respect of anti-Semitism?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, I join my noble friend Lord Leigh in saying that, yes, it is disappointing. But the Government are aware of only five institutions; there may be other providers which have adopted the definition but have not seen fit to respond to any of the letters. They have been encouraged to do so and to inform the Government of their reasons should they not be adopting the definition. My noble friend is also right that the Government collaborated with the EHRC on its new *Freedom of Expression* code for universities. Universities should be in no doubt now regarding their duty to promote free speech and the holding of events on campuses.

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Labour): My Lords, while applauding the record of the Minister in this field and welcoming her to the Front Bench, may I ask her whether she agrees that commitment to this definition is a good badge of one's commitment to human rights and anti-Semitism generally? What reasons, if any, are advanced by those defaulting institutions?

Baroness Berridge: I am grateful to the noble Lord. Yes, this is an internationally recognised definition, and we were the first Government to adopt it. Unfortunately, I cannot elaborate on any institution's reasons at the moment. However, as I said, the Secretary of State for Communities has asked institutions that are having reservations to inform the Government about their reasons.

Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, I thank the Minister for the generalities she has mentioned, but can I bring her into the real world? Jewish students at the University of Bristol have been dismayed by the lack of response from their institution following a lecturer using slides to teach sociology students conspiracy theories about mainstream Jewish groups, such as the Community Security Trust—I am on its advisory board—the Jewish Leadership Council, of which I am a vice-president, and the Board of Deputies. Does the Minister agree that the adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism would assist universities in responding to such disgraceful incidents in the future? This House cannot just leave it to them on their own.

Baroness Berridge: The noble Lord is right that the definition is very important. It should leave universities in no doubt about what is and is not acceptable behaviour on campus. Free speech should be promoted; there is a presumption that events should go ahead. However, free speech should always be within the law and any restrictions should be necessary and reasonable. All students on our campuses, whatever their faith background, should be able to learn without harassment but should also be exposed to new ideas and to criticism of them.

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, I declare an interest as president of the Council of Christians and Jews, founded in the depths of the Second World War by Chief Rabbi Hertz and Archbishop William Temple. I applaud the noble Baroness's long history of standing up for freedom of religion and belief. Like the noble Lord, the CCJ hears numerous reports of no-platforming, intimidation and lack of free speech. I fully accept that

universities are autonomous, but will the Minister look for ways in which pressure can be applied to ensure that these standards are kept? Does she agree that mere exhortation is not really working?

Baroness Berridge: I am grateful to the most reverend Primate. I obviously agree, but it is not “mere exhortation”. The EHRC guidance on freedom of expression on campus was put together with a number of stakeholders, including Universities UK, to deal with exactly the issues that have been faced. The universities have been reminded of their duty in relation to no-platforming and the closing down of free speech by the Office for Students, which is responsible for student well-being and safeguarding on campus. However, in the recent legislation, your Lordships’ House ensured that universities are autonomous institutions. Although the Secretary of State can issue guidance, this has to take into account the autonomy of those institutions.

Lord Bassam of Brighton (Labour): I completely agree with the Minister on this point, but more government pressure needs to be put on the Office for Students, which has a distinct responsibility for this. Although it is a relatively new regulator, this is an important role. What more can the Government do to put pressure on the OfS?

Baroness Berridge: My Lords, in response to the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s recent report on racial harassment on campus, the Office for Students issued a consultation on expectations to the providers. The Government are in no doubt, however, that universities should take rigorous action when free speech is being closed down or when any student faces hatred or harassment, whether physical or online. The regulator has only had its full powers since August this year. I remind your Lordships that this House voted for the autonomy of our academic institutions. The Government are, therefore, using guidance to put what pressure they can on universities.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-11-04/debates/99C22CE0-ED2C-45EF-99F4-02162EBA8F18/UniversitiesAnti-Semitism>

The “Freedom of Expression” Code, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/freedom-of-expression-guide-for-higher-education-providers-and-students-unions-england-and-wales.pdf>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/tackling-racial-harassment-universities-challenged.pdf>

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answer

Jerusalem: Water Supply

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL302] To ask Her Majesty’s Government what discussions they intend to have with the government of Israel about its reasons for the reported denial of access to the Ein Hanya natural spring near Al-Walaja, within the municipal boundary of Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We regularly make clear our concerns to the Israeli authorities about the difficulties of access to Jerusalem for Palestinians from the West Bank. We are concerned by unilateral Israeli measures in East Jerusalem, including around the Palestinian village of Al-Walaja which threaten to restrict Palestinian access to their lands. We are also concerned by ongoing demolitions

in the village. We continue to make clear to the Israeli authorities our serious concern at the overall increase in demolitions of Palestinian properties across the West Bank.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-10-22/HL302/>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/divorcedissolutionandseparation.html>

Domestic Abuse Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/domesticabuse.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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