



Representing, connecting and supporting Jewish people in Scotland

# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### Scottish Parliament Written Answer

#### IHRA definition of antisemitism

**S5W-25837 John Finnie (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S5W-25533 by Aileen Campbell on 8 October 2019, whether it will provide the information that was requested regarding which bodies requested it to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

**Aileen Campbell:** There were no formal requests to adopt the definition

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-25837>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-25533>

### Welsh Government Fol release

**Religious assembly petitions: A copy of correspondence relating to the petitions on religious assembly in schools** (31 documents)

<https://gov.wales/atish13492>

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## Israel

### Foreign and Commonwealth Office

#### Gaza hostilities, November 2019: UK statement

A Foreign Office spokesperson said: We are deeply concerned by the escalation of hostilities in Gaza. The UK condemns the firing of rockets at civilian populations. Any attacks targeted against civilians are unlawful and unjustifiable. We call on all sides to

rapidly de-escalate the situation, and support the UN and Egyptian efforts to achieve that objective.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gaza-hostilities-uk-statement>

## United Nations

### **Palestine Refugee Agency Tackling Management Issues, Continues to Deliver Vital Services amid Misconduct Probe, Officer in Charge Tells Fourth Committee**

... **Christian Saunders, Officer in Charge, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**, said that under the present circumstances, with the unexpected departure of the Agency's senior leadership, the priorities are ensuring the continuity of operations and providing strong leadership with a focus on essential reforms. The circumstances are exacerbated by the worst cash-flow situation in UNRWA's 70-year history, he added. ...

As for the financial situation, he emphasized that it is even more critical than it was in 2018, with a funding gap of \$89 million — \$25 million larger than during the fourth quarter of that year. ... A rupture in services would affect the most vulnerable beneficiaries, including more than 1.5 million refugees receiving basic emergency assistance, principally food, he cautioned.

... he reported that the situation in Gaza remains dire, with almost the entire registered refugee population reliant on UNRWA for basic needs, in particular food aid. Regarding public statements by the East Jerusalem municipality about closing the Agency's facilities there, he said UNRWA is monitoring the situation and engaging with Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the matter. In Syria, UNRWA continues to restore services in camps where security conditions permit ... Emphasizing that the community of Palestine refugees from Syria inside Lebanon live in extremely difficult conditions, he said they are actively exploring ways to leave, with some demanding deregistration from UNRWA in the belief that it would offer access to resettlement opportunities available to other refugees from Syria. ...

**The representative of Israel** expressed concern about the corruption that has affected UNRWA, citing the interim findings by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) as well as the resignation of Pierre Krähenbühl, the Commissioner-General. Much must change, she emphasized, recalling that for years her delegation has protested the Agency's activities, including that it works to inflate the number of Palestine refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works to mitigate their number by resettling them, but UNRWA counts as refugees even people who have become full citizens of other countries, she noted. Expressing concern about the Agency's use of humanitarian funding for advocacy and to provide a one-sided view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, she warned that its budgetary needs will continue to grow exponentially, reiterating that there are discrepancies in the number of refugees. ...

**An observer for the State of Palestine** emphasized that politicization of the Agency's mandate cannot be accepted. Since its establishment, UNRWA has played a pivotal role in providing essential assistance to Palestine refugees, and as such it is "impossible to accept the distorted, malicious narratives targeting the Agency and those who serve in it, all aimed at abrogating the refugees' rights," she said. Israel's attempts to replace UNRWA's education and health services in Occupied East Jerusalem are not benign, she said, adding that they constitute a flagrant attempt to unlawfully impose sovereignty and exploit a vulnerable population. ...

**Rafa Arif (Norway), Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East**, introduced that panel's report (document A/74/337) ...

**Feda Abdelhady-Nasser, observer for the State of Palestine**, said Israeli officials have attempted to nullify the status and rights of Palestine refugees and to discredit UNRWA, defaming those who seek to defend refugee rights. Describing Israel's allegations as part of age-old attempts to distract discussion from the fundamental issues, she rejected the claims as libelous ... Noting that the OIOS investigation found no fraud, corruption or misuse of funds, she pointed out that the alleged misconduct did not impair UNRWA's operations. ...

Underlining the vital need for funding to ensure UNRWA's financial health in 2020, she said Palestine refugees remain in need of assistance and reassurance that the world is not abandoning them. ...

In Jordan and Lebanon, Palestine refugees continue to struggle with limited opportunities in the context of broader economic difficulties and the marginalization of refugees. In Syria, the conflict has profoundly affected Palestine refugees, she observed, also noting that their situation in the West Bank continues to be marked by violence and dispossession. East Jerusalem is becoming more untenable as Israel, the occupying Power, attempts to further entrench its de facto annexation of the city ...

No doubt emboldened by recent events, Israel is escalating pressure against UNRWA operations in that city and is even threatening to bring an end to the Agency's services, she continued. Conditions for refugees are particularly acute in the Gaza Strip, where the dire humanitarian situation caused by Israel's aggression and its illegal 12-year-long blockade constitute the root cause of the aid dependency afflicting 80 per cent of the enclave's population, she added. ...

**Andrea Pontiroli, European Union** delegation, noting that the Palestine refugee issue is an internationally agreed parameter for the solution of the conflict, stressed that UNRWA must be able to continue to provide that community necessary protection and essential services. The Agency makes a key contribution to the viability of the two-State solution ...

**Noa Furman (Israel)** noted that her country has worked closely with UNRWA in providing services to Palestine refugees over the last 70 years and her delegation has strongly criticized the Agency, but it does not wish to harm the aid. Regretfully, however, rather than focusing on humanitarian relief, the Agency promotes a controversial political agenda, including support for the right of return for Palestine refugees, she noted. Recalling that Israel warned against members of Hamas holding key positions within the Agency, she said supporting the Agency today is a misuse of international funds, describing UNRWA as "corrupted and ineffective". ... She went on to say UNRWA has become a political organization, emphasizing: "It is now a Palestinian organization that serves the Palestinian narrative." ...

**Mr. Saunders** commended UNRWA's staff ... UNRWA is an effective and reliable partner, he said ... He went on to highlight the precarious nature of the Agency's finances, declaring: "Simply put, in two weeks, we run out of funds." ... Where will its 250,000 students go if education services are interrupted? Noting that such an eventuality could negatively affect stability in an already tense region, he urged those able to make additional contributions to do so urgently and those who have made pledges to make them available. ...

**An observer for the State of Palestine**, responding to Israel, said that country's baseless attacks and claims of corruption within UNRWA have already been proven untrue. "There is a clear solution to this problem," she said, calling upon Israel to stop violating the right of Palestinians to self-determination. ... Rejecting Israel's rhetoric about who constitutes a Palestine refugee, she described it as an attempt to strip them of their status and rights, underlining that those rights do not diminish with the passage of time. The right of return is an individual and collective one, explicitly reaffirmed in more than 150 United Nations resolutions, and cannot be dismissed to accommodate Israel's schemes ...

**The representative of Israel** ... described the notion that Israel is the only reason for

Palestinian suffering as false. Israelis were the ones who accepted the initial peace plan, he said, adding that Palestinians rejected the proposal and Israel was attacked by its Arab neighbours. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/gaspd710.doc.htm>

**Report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/74/337)**

<https://undocs.org/en/A/74/337>

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## **Relevant Legislation** \*\* new or updated today

### **Scottish Parliament**

#### **Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill**

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

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## **Consultations** \*\* new or updated today

**\*\* closes in 6 days**

**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>

**Draft content of the Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Specified Type A Procedures) (Scotland) Regulations** (closing date 11 December 2019)

<https://consult.gov.scot/population-health/human-tissue-regulations-2019/>

**Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill** (closing date 31 January 2020)

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/113449.aspx>

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