

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Religious Hatred: Islam

Steve Baker (Conservative) [286] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to establish a working definition of Islamophobia; and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall: The Government agrees that there needs to be a formal definition of Islamophobia to give the issue a stronger focus. We have committed to appointing independent advisers to provide expert advice on a definition. The first of these advisers, Imam Qari Asim MBE, was appointed in July 2019. We are taking steps to appoint individuals with the right combination of skills and experience to drive the work. We endeavour to move at pace on these appointments; good progress is balanced by the necessity for careful consideration of due process.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-12-20/286/>

House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Marriage

Baroness Cox (Crossbench) [HL23] To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made on their commitment in the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper to "explore the legal and practical challenges of limited reform relating to the law on marriage and religious weddings."

Baroness Cox (Crossbench) [HL25] To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to amend the Marriage Act 1949 to make it a legal requirement for couples to civilly register their marriage before, or at the same time as, their religious ceremony.

Lord Keen of Elie: The law has long made provision for couples, including Muslim couples, to marry in their place of worship in a way that gives them legal rights and protections. The Government shares the concern that some people may

nonetheless marry in a way that does not, and without appreciating the consequences.

The independent Sharia review has recommended an offence apply to religious celebrants marrying in a ceremony that is outside the ambit of the Marriage Acts.. Any legislative proposal, including such an offence, must be thoroughly assessed for its fairness to all religious groups and for how far it could achieve the change of practice intended. That is why it is with the greatest care that the Government is continuing the exploration of both limited reform and non-legislative options that it began in detail in the spring.

Separately from this exploration, the Law Commission has begun its weddings project. It will make recommendations for how the wider law on getting married in England and Wales can be systematically reformed in a way that is simple, fair and consistent.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-12-19/HL23/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-12-19/HL25/>

The Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, referred to above, can be read at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

The Sharia 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_CPGF_Report_into_Sharia_Law_in_the_UK_WEB.pdf

The Law Commission weddings project, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/law-commission-begins-work-on-weddings-reform/>

Sports: Racial Discrimination

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative) [HL14] To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they are taking to promote anti-racism in sport.

Baroness Barran: The Government is clear that racism has no place in sport or society at large, in line with the sport and physical activity strategy 'Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation', which has diversity and inclusion at its heart. Government remains supportive of a number of anti-racism initiatives that work with sports bodies from grassroots to the elite, including Show Racism the Red Card and Kick it Out. With Kick It Out stats demonstrating that racism constitutes 65 per cent of reports made via them in the 18/19 season, government will continue to call governing bodies to account for actions in this space. Over the past year the Government has led debates in the House of Commons on tackling racism in sport (on 22nd May 2019 and 12th July 2019), and hosted an Anti-Racism Summit in February 2019. This led to clear commitments to tackle racism in football stadia from the three main English football organisations in July 2019. Ministers and officials continue to speak to the FA and relevant football bodies to explore what more can be done. Grassroots sport clubs also receive support in tackling racism from our national sport council, Sport England, who provide free support and learning in running a club through its "Club Matters" programme.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-12-19/HL14/>

The Strategy referred to above can be read at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

The wrong dates have been quoted in relation to the House of Commons debates referred to above. There was no relevant debate on 22 May 2019, and the Commons was not sitting on 12 July 2019. It is possible that Baroness Barran may be referring to the Opposition Day debate on “Discrimination in Sport” that took place on 12 June 2019

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-06-12/debates/012867F0-9265-41A5-A046-BB3D17B41538/DiscriminationInSport>

and the Government statement and subsequent Q&A on “Discrimination in Football” that took place on 11 April 2019

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-04-11/debates/53CBC73F-CFE0-49A3-8E73-21AE5A9CD7E2/DiscriminationInFootball>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Catherine West (Labour) (26) Anti-Semitic incidents: This House condemns the widely reported instance of a 13 year old boy receiving vile anti-Semitic abuse on a London bus on 5 January; sends this House’s solidarity and sympathy to the Jewish community following this and other recently widely reported instances of anti-Semitic abuse; again calls on the Government to redouble its efforts to work with the Jewish community and Jewish organisations to ensure that their concerns are heard and steps are established to ensure that the Jewish community feels safe in the UK; and commits to working towards eliminating anti-Semitic and racist abuse as quickly as possible.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/53479/antisemitic-incidents>

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Holocaust

House of Lords Written Answer

National Holocaust Memorial Centre and Learning Service: Planning Permission

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL46] To ask Her Majesty’s Government, following their decision to call in the planning application for a UK Holocaust Memorial, whether all the evidence submitted to Westminster City Council will be fully considered.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: Following the decision to call in the planning application for the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre, the case will now proceed to a public inquiry overseen by an independent planning Inspector. The inquiry will consider evidence including that submitted to Westminster City Council, and is currently scheduled to begin on 27 May 2020.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-12-19/HL46/>

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Israel

House of Lords Debate

Queen’s Speech

col 104 **The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative):** ... with a new Government in place

and at a time of severe international tension, it must be right to start looking for a new foreign policy ... no more so than in that traditional cauldron of the Middle East. ...

To begin with, we should formally eschew the use of targeted assassination as an instrument of foreign policy. What happened in Baghdad last week was ethically unacceptable. ...

In nearly every case, we chose military intervention over dialogue ... We need rapidly to change this. We should begin swiftly in Iran to seek again the common ground on which understanding might be built ... A serious and much respected elderly Israeli statesman once told me that at his age he had learned that it was a better use of his time to talk to his enemies than to his friends. I hope that it is not too late for us to learn that lesson. ...

col 130 **Lord Polak (Conservative):** ... I also welcome the Government's commitment in the gracious Speech to ban public bodies from imposing their own direct or indirect boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries. The Prime Minister talked of the "nauseating frequency" with which Israel is singled out.

While we were engaged in a general election, the General Assembly of the United Nations was in session passing resolutions on hot spots around the globe, calling out countries that needed calling out. There was one resolution on North Korea, one on Syria, one on Iran, and two on Russia. There were no resolutions on China, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. But there were no fewer than 18 resolutions on Israel. That is totally unacceptable and, what is more, far too often the UK votes for these resolutions.

On Friday 13 December, as the final results of our election were being announced, a resolution was passed at the UN General Assembly on "Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem".

I would need more than the five minutes allocated to explain that the premise of the resolution is unacceptable. However, suffice it for me to say that the resolution totally ignored terror attacks against Israeli civilians in Israel, referring to them as "tensions and violence". It negated the deadly attacks in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities, and it sought to strip Israel of its inherent right to self-defence by classifying every defensive measure as a violation of international law. In addition, it referred to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem only by its Islamic name, Haram al-Sharif. What did we do? We voted for the resolution, whereas our allies and friends in Canada, Australia and the US had the courage to vote against it.

I have no problem with legitimate criticism where it is due, but this obsession with Israel needs to be addressed. Israel is being singled out with nauseating frequency, to borrow a phrase, and we are joining in. This singling out of the Jewish state is wrong, unjustified and plays a role in the rise and rise of anti-Semitism. Whether it manifests itself in Monsey in the United States or just down the road in South Hampstead, it arises, as we have seen in the Labour Party, when there is a failure of leadership on the grandest scale.

As we began today's debate it was a Jewish fast day: the 10th day of the Jewish month of Tevet. It marks the day when the siege of Jerusalem was begun by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon in 586 BC/BCE—the beginning of the battle that ultimately destroyed the first Temple. Yet there are resolutions at UN agencies that recognise no Jewish connection to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. I therefore urge the Minister to look very carefully before we sign up to resolutions at the UN and other bodies.

col 131 In conclusion, I am unapologetic for raising once again the issue of Palestinian prisoner salary payments. In contradiction of its assurances to the international community, the Palestinian Authority pays monthly salaries to Palestinian terrorists and their families. In 2018, the Palestinian Authority paid over £260 million—around 7% of its annual budget—on salaries to killers and murderers. In November 2019, the Netherlands became the first European country to discontinue direct aid to the Palestinian Authority due to its terror reward policy. I therefore urge the Minister also to look carefully at this. We must pay our way, but not when our aid is used to pay for slay. We must find a method

by which aid payments serve the recipients who need our support in Palestinian society and at the same time serve the interests of the British taxpayer. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-01-07/debates/4BE7E619-C7ED-43E2-B7C7-0BB9D05B1EAF/Queen%E2%80%99SSpeech>

House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

Middle East: Security

col 260 **Suella Braverman (Conservative):** In light of Soleimani's alliances with Hezbollah and Hamas, and now the explicit threat of revenge, does my right hon. Friend agree that Israel is exposed and faces a real risk of attack from Iran? If he does, what steps are the UK Government taking to support Israel, a true friend of the UK and of democracy, in its right to self-defence?

Ben Wallace [Secretary of State for Defence]: Regretfully, I do not think the threat to Israel has changed because, even before the general's death, Iran had been using its proxies to directly and indirectly target Israeli interests not just in the region but around the world. Israel, in its public statements, recognises the threat that General Soleimani posed but also recognises the importance of finding a solution to the growing tension in the region that helps absolutely no one. The tension does not help Iran find a way out, it does not help Israel's security and it does not help Iraq's security, which is why we are determined to see what we can do to try to de-escalate through the diplomatic route while also finding long-term solutions in the hope that the JCPOA continues to flourish or, if it does not, to ensure there is another path for Iran to follow. ...

col 266 **Robert Halfon (Conservative):** Since the nuclear agreement with Iran, Iran has stepped up its support for terrorism, with both finance and military equipment for Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon. What is my right hon. Friend doing to contain the Hezbollah threat not just to Israel but to the wider region?

Ben Wallace: My right hon. Friend will know that this House proscribed the full element of Hezbollah a few months ago. It is key that we work with our allies to strengthen Lebanon so that it has some resistance to Hezbollah within its state. That is important because Hezbollah has a habit of assassinating people in Lebanon who disagree with it. At the same time, it is important that we work with our ally, Israel, ensuring that we share any knowledge that either we have or Israel has in order to protect it from terrorists.

col 267 **Ian Paisley (DUP):** It will not be lost on the Defence Secretary that one of the first political organisations to mourn the passing of Soleimani was Republican Sinn Féin ... The Government previously indicated that they were carrying out a review of whether to proscribe the Muslim Brotherhood. I understand that the organisations we are discussing are Shi'a, but is there still going to be a review into proscribing the Muslim Brotherhood, and would that help to protect the citizens of this country?

Ben Wallace: The hon. Gentleman makes a point about Republican Sinn Féin. I noticed the tweet: it is bizarre, but it shows the long tentacles that Hezbollah or the revolutionary guard of Iran may have had in the hon. Gentleman's own communities. The proscription of any organisation is a matter for the Home Office, which will no doubt have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said; I can get him an answer from that Department if he wishes. ...

col 272 **Ben Wallace:** ... In 2006 the Iranians made what was called the "grand bargain", which was a whole offer that included—if memory serves me rightly—recognition of Israel and the abandonment of any nuclear programme. Both sides

seem to want a “grand offer”; both sides want a “grand deal”, and I think it our duty to try to get them to the table to offer such a deal. ...

col 273 Jim Shannon (DUP): ... Under General Soleimani and the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its involvement with terrorist groups across the world, Iran has the blood of thousands of innocents on its hands. Iran has said that it will continue to pursue nuclear power. It has also stated that it will not rest until Israel is destroyed. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to provide help and support for Israel in the light of the threat from Iran against its so-called enemy? Further, will he publicly state again that this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland stands alongside Israel at all times?

col 274 Ben Wallace: We support Israel. We support its right to defend itself and its right to exist, and we will work alongside it to make sure that its security is protected. We will also work alongside anyone in the middle east who seeks to establish better stability and security for their people, but also to ensure we resolve this current growing conflict. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-01-07/debates/BB5857A1-081F-483A-9E58-E22BEBBCBA673/MiddleEastSecurity>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Martyn Day (SNP) (30) ICC preliminary examination of the situation in Palestine: That this House notes the statement from the International Criminal Court prosecutor, Fatuo Bensouda, on the conclusion of the preliminary examination of the situation in Palestine; reaffirms full support for the application of international humanitarian law and prosecution where violations are found to have occurred; welcomes the scope of the investigation into war crimes committed in the Israel-Palestine conflict; further notes that in addition to investigating Israel for war crimes the investigation will also look at Palestinian organisations for targeting civilians, use of torture and denial of fair trials; welcomes the impartiality of the investigation; and calls upon the UK Government to apply all necessary pressure upon those party to the Israel-Palestine conflict and urge unfettered access for the ICC to carry out its investigation without hindrance.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/53483/icc-preliminary-examination-of-the-situation-in-palestine>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

UK condemns plans for new housing units across the West Bank

Commenting on Israel’s announcement of plans for new housing units across the West Bank, Dr Andrew Murrison, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, said: The UK condemns the Israeli government’s advancement of yet more plans for over 1,900 housing units across the West Bank.

It is the UK’s longstanding position that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the viability of the two-state solution.

We call on Israel to halt settlement expansion immediately.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-condemns-plans-for-new-housing-units-across-the-west-bank>

Scottish Parliament Motion

S5M-20346 John Mason (SNP): Growing Tensions in the Middle East – That the Parliament expresses its concern regarding the risk of increased violence in the Middle East following the assassination by the US of the Iranian, Qasem Soleimani, near Baghdad airport; acknowledges the recent escalation of violence, with Iran's first direct act of aggression towards the US since 1979 coming in the form of ballistic missile attacks on two bases in Iraq that house US and coalition troops; questions whether the assassination of Soleimani can legitimately be considered defensive; considers that the US being a Western, mainly white, English-speaking country does not offer grounds for Scotland and the UK to automatically support it; recognises the long-term tensions in the Middle East; believes that only through serious peace talks with no pre-conditions can there be long-term peace, and considers that such talks must include representatives of the US, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Russia and the EU.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-20346>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Steve Baker (Conservative) [285] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will (a) reappoint and (b) adequately resource the Prime Minister's Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief; and if he will make a statement.

Heather Wheeler: Rehman Chishti MP has been reappointed as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. Funding has been agreed for the office which should adequately cover travel and administrative costs.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-12-20/285/>

Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review

Steve Baker (Conservative) [284] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what his timescale is for implementing the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians; and if he will make a statement.

Heather Wheeler: The British government is committed to implementing the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's Review. The recommendations have been divided into short, medium and longer term priorities and we have already implemented a good number of them. This includes recently appointing a Director General level champion for Freedom of Religion or Belief and marking Red Wednesday in support of persecuted Christians and members of other minority groups. Some of the recommendations will take longer to implement and many will require an ongoing effort to embed into the working practice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Departments.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-12-20/284/>

The Review referred to above can be read at

<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

House of Lords Written Answer

Persecution of Christians across the Globe Independent Review

Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench) [HL6] To ask Her Majesty's Government how, and when, they intend to fully implement all of the recommendations in the Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians, published in July.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The British Government is committed to implementing the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's Review in a way that will bring real improvements to the lives of those persecuted because of their faith or belief. The recommendations have been divided into short, medium and longer term priorities and we have already implemented a good number of them. This includes recently appointing a Director General level champion for Freedom of Religion or Belief and marking Red Wednesday in support of persecuted Christians and members of other minority groups. Some of the recommendations will take longer to implement and many will require an ongoing effort to embed into the working practices of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other departments.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-12-19/HL6/>

The Review referred to above can be read at

<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

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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>

Bill as introduced

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/58-01/002/5801002.pdf>

Explanatory Notes

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/58-01/002/5801002en.pdf>

First Reading, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-01-07/debates/597F28A4-E0A8-43F2-B6ED-DAE8A6C949E9/DivorceDissolutionAndSeparationBill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-01-07/debates/597F28A4-E0A8-43F2-B6ED-DAE8A6C949E9/DivorceDissolutionAndSeparationBill(HL))

** **European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill**

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

Committee Stage, House of Commons

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-01-07/debates/C5ADC5C3-0008-4CBB-81D6-717666FC7C4B/EuropeanUnion\(WithdrawalAgreement\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-01-07/debates/C5ADC5C3-0008-4CBB-81D6-717666FC7C4B/EuropeanUnion(WithdrawalAgreement)Bill)

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 9 days**

Equality Act 2010: Commencing the socio-economic duty (Welsh Government)

(closing date 17 January 2020)

<https://gov.wales/equality-act-2010-commencing-socio-economic-duty>

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

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

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