



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Other Relevant Information

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Home Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

House of Lords: Catering

Baroness Walmsley (Liberal Democrat) [HL958] To ask the Senior Deputy Speaker what steps the House of Lords administration is taking to increase the availability of halal food in its cafeterias.

Lord Lanning: The Senior Deputy Speaker has asked me, as Chair of the Services Committee to respond on his behalf. Following careful consideration, the provision of halal products when weighed against demand, is unfortunately not viable in terms of costs, logistics and supplier management.

Upon request for events, the Catering and Retail Service (CRS) can provide pre-stunned halal meat and poultry from certified and trusted suppliers that meet the standards for recognised accreditation schemes such as the RSPCA's Freedom Food and Red Tractor.

CRS fully understand that all its customers do have wider individual requirements which it aims to cater for. In doing so CRS provide weekly changing menus in our cafeterias and table service restaurants offering an increased array of vegan and vegetarian options which continue to grow in popularity.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-01-29/HL958/>

Downing Street

Latest updates on ministerial appointments: 13 February 2020

- Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP remains Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and First Secretary of State
- Rt Hon Michael Gove MP remains Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Minister for the Cabinet Office
- Rt Hon Priti Patel MP remains Secretary of State for the Home Department

- The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the appointment of Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP as Chancellor of the Exchequer
- Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP remains Lord Chancellor, and Secretary of State for Justice
- The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the appointment of the Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP as Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. He will also be Minister for COP26
- Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP remains Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
- The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the appointment of Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP as Secretary of State for International Development
- Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP remains Secretary of State for International Trade, President of the Board of Trade, and Minister for Women and Equalities
- The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the appointment of Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP as Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
- Rt Hon Baroness Evans of Bowes Park remains Lord Privy Seal, and Leader of the House of Lords
- Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP remains Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
- The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the appointment of Suella Braverman MP as Attorney General. She will attend Cabinet
- Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP remains Secretary of State for Education
- Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP remains Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
- The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the appointment of George Eustice MP as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP remains Secretary of State for Transport
- Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP remains Secretary of State for Defence
- Rt Hon Alister Jack MP remains Secretary of State for Scotland

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-updates-on-ministerial-appointments-13-february-2020>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) [12305] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether it remains the policy of the UK Government to support a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would lead to Jerusalem as a shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states.

Andrew Murrison: The UK's longstanding position on the Middle East Peace Process is clear and has not changed: we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps and a just, fair, agreed and realistic

settlement for refugees. It must also ensure Jerusalem is a shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states, with access and religious rights of both peoples respected.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-02-04/12305/>

Israel: Palestinians

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) [12307] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the US Administration's Peace to Prosperity plan in supporting a return to negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Andrew Murrison: All serious proposals for peace deserve a fair hearing. A peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians that leads to peaceful coexistence could unlock the potential for the entire region, and provide both sides with the opportunity for a brighter future. Only Israeli and Palestinian leaders can determine whether these proposals can meet the needs and aspirations of the people they represent. We encourage them to give these plans genuine and fair consideration, and explore whether they might prove a first step on the road back to negotiations.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-02-04/12307/>

"Peace to Prosperity", referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperity-0120.pdf>

Middle East: Peace Negotiations

Andrea Jenkens (Conservative) [12383] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to his Saudi Arabian counterpart on encouraging the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table to discuss the US Administration's Middle East peace plan proposal.

Andrew Murrison: We have spoken to a range of regional partners about the US Administration's plan. We will continue to do so. Only Israeli and Palestinian leaders can determine whether these proposals can meet the needs and aspirations of the people they represent. We encourage them to give these plans genuine and fair consideration, and explore whether they might prove a first step on the road back to negotiations.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-02-04/12383/>

The peace plan proposal referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperity-0120.pdf>

House of Lords Written Answer

Israel: Palestinians

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL933] To ask Her Majesty's Government when they first had the opportunity to read the President of the USA's proposal Peace To Prosperity: A Vision To Improve The Lives Of The Palestinian And Israeli People, published on 28 January; and what assessment they have made of the political framework proposals contained therein.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The US Administration shared details of their proposals with us in advance. However, this is an American plan. We were not involved in its formulation. The US are aware of our position on the Middle East Peace Process. This is clearly a serious proposal, reflecting extensive time and

effort. But only Israeli and Palestinian leaders can determine whether these proposals can meet the needs and aspirations of the people they represent. We encourage them to give these plans genuine and fair consideration, and explore whether they might prove a first step on the road back to negotiations.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-01-29/HL933/>

“Peace to Prosperity”, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Peace-to-Prosperity-0120.pdf>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

European Parliament Debate

US Middle East plan: EU response in line with international law

NB: The following abstract only includes contributions in English

Josep Borrell Fontelles (Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy): ... At an international level for a number of years there has been little or no substantive engagement in efforts to resolve the conflict. ... We have been vocal in our support for a negotiated two-state solution based on the internationally agreed parameters and in accordance with international law. This means a two-state solution based on the parameters set in the Council Conclusions – our Council – of July 2014, that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, and resolves all permanent status issues in order to end the conflict. ...

It remains my firm view that there is still a way forward if both parties are willing to resume credible and meaningful negotiations. International support for any such efforts would clearly be crucial to their success. In this regard, the tabling of concrete proposals, such as the United States one, could be helpful, both as a catalyst for deeper reflection on the way forward and as a potential opportunity to quick-start a political process which has been at a standstill for too long.

However, as I have said, the proposal tabled two weeks ago clearly challenges the internationally-agreed parameters, and it is difficult to see how this initiative can bring both parties back to the table. ...

We need to know whether the proposals themselves are really open for negotiation. Is it the starting point, or the end point? ... We are ready to work with the international community to revive a political process in line with international law, which ensures equal rights and which is acceptable to both parties. ...

Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou (on behalf of the PPE Group): ... Mr Borrell, you stated that the United States Middle East peace plan departs from internationally agreed parameters. You also used rather pointed language originally when you said that part of this plan, if implemented, could not pass unchallenged. Naturally this evoked a reaction from our Israeli friends, who warned that this type of – what they called – ‘threatening’ language could lead to the EU’s role in the peace process being minimised. Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership has angrily dismissed President Trump’s plan as a conspiracy.

... this plan could perhaps serve as a basis for resuming talks in earnest with the understanding that there are, in fact, painful concessions to be made on both sides. ...

Kati Piri (on behalf of the S&D Group): Mr President, we do not know what President Trump's deal of the century actually is apart from being one-sided, illegal and intentionally provocative, but it is most certainly not a genuine effort at finding a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ... This plan disregards the international rules-based order. It not only normalises illegal settlements but also clears the way for the utterly illegitimate annexation of the Jordan Valley and 30% of the West Bank. We must make clear that such actions will have serious consequences for our relationship with Israel if that happens. Inevitably, it will also lead to more suffering for the Palestinian people, whether that is because their land is annexed, their water resources are taken or because they lack control over their own borders. ...

Charlie Weimers (on behalf of the ECR Group): ... Palestinians will not even sit down at the table. Many in the Palestinian population prefer violence.

In fact, last month, Palestinian NGOs refused EU funding rules prohibiting our aid to be channelled to terrorist groups. ... show them that the EU means business; encourage long-term re-engagement and easing of tensions; say a thousand times: no, no, no to EU funding Palestinian rejectionist and terrorist policies. ...

Sven Mikser (S&D): ... Whatever domestic political ends in the US or in Israel the plan's launch may have served, its chances of revitalising the peace process are, unfortunately, virtually non-existent. Moreover, if Israel, following Palestinian rejection of the plan, were to restart settlement activity or go on to annex parts of the occupied territories, it may be entirely counterproductive to sustainable peace and eventually prove detrimental to the two-state solution altogether. ...

Niyazi Kizilyürek (GUE/NGL): Mr President, the so-called 'deal of the century' is a plain violation of international law. ...

It rolls back from the agreements of 1967 and denies Palestinians issue to Jerusalem as their capital. I regret to say that Trump's plan is not only an assault on Palestinian rights, but also an attempt to put forward a new regional order that completely undermines international law. ...

Josep Borrell Fontelles: ... the majority of the Council has supported the statement in which we sent a message saying that, first, everybody has to refrain from any unilateral actions contrary to international law which could exacerbate tensions further. We are asking that no one annexes the Jordan Valley. Yet this may happen. If it happens, you can be sure that it is not going to be peaceful. Maybe for some it doesn't matter, but for us it matters a lot because we cannot provoke a wave of violence – another wave of violence – in Palestine.

We are asking Palestinians to keep calm and not go to violent demonstrations. We asked for the proposal to be considered as a starting point and I said clearly that maybe it could break the stalemate and create the dynamics in which we can go and talk again about what we can do in order to look for a solution to this very old, damaging and painful problem.

I am not denying the possibility of this being a starting point. What I am denying is not this possibility, but the fact that it is being considered as an end point because, if I tell you 'come and negotiate, but I'll tell you one thing. If we don't agree, I will implement my proposal anyway.' – this is not a big incentive to negotiate. ...

To read the full transcript see

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-02-11-ITM-010_EN.html

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN rights office issues report on business activities related to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

The UN Human Rights Office on Wednesday issued a report on business enterprises involved in certain activities relating to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in response to a specific request by the UN Human Rights Council, contained in a March 2016 resolution, that mandated the Office to produce a database of business enterprises involved in such activities.*

In an interim report (A/HRC/37/39) presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2018 by the then High Commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN Human Rights Office noted it had reviewed information that was publicly available, or had been received from a variety of sources, about an initial 307 companies. After further research, the total number reviewed increased to 321. Of these, a total of 206 companies were considered for further assessment.

The report released on Wednesday sets out conclusions following further communications with business entities, as well as a thorough review and assessment of all information available. It identifies 112 business entities which the UN Human Rights Office, on the basis of the information it has gathered, has reasonable grounds to conclude have been involved in one or more of the specific activities referenced in Human Rights Council resolution 31/36.

Of the 112 business entities identified in the report, 94 are domiciled in Israel and 18 in six other States. During the complex process of drawing up the database, the Office consulted the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, and held widespread discussions with numerous States, civil society organizations, think tanks, academics and others, as well as having extensive interactions with the companies themselves.

The report makes clear that the reference to these business entities is not, and does not purport to be, a judicial or quasi-judicial process. While the settlements as such are regarded as illegal under international law, this report does not provide a legal characterization of the activities in question, or of business enterprises' involvement in them. Any further steps with respect to the continuation of this mandate will be a matter for the Member States of the Human Rights Council, which will consider the report during the Council's next session, beginning on 24 February.

"I am conscious this issue has been, and will continue to be, highly contentious," said Michelle Bachelet, the current High Commissioner for Human Rights. "However, after an extensive and meticulous review process, we are satisfied this fact-based report reflects the serious consideration that has been given to this unprecedented and highly complex mandate, and that it responds appropriately to the Human Rights Council's request contained in resolution 31/36," Bachelet said.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25542&LangID=E>

Database of all business enterprises involved in the activities detailed in paragraph 96 of the independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/HRC/43/71)

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session43/Documents/A_HRC_43_71.docx

Interim Report (A/HRC/37/39)

<https://undocs.org/A/HRC/37/39>

TOP

Other Relevant Information

European Parliament Debate

Fighting against antisemitism, racism and hatred across Europe

NB: The following abstract only includes contributions in English

Nikolina Brnjac (President-in-Office of the Council): Madam President, having recently celebrated the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, this discussion is today more important than ever. For several years now, a worrying increase in the number of manifestations of hate speech, hate crimes, racism, xenophobia and intolerance in Europe has been observed, affecting minorities and other vulnerable groups, including Jewish people. In particular, we note with strong concern that anti-Semitic hatred remains widespread. Let me be clear on this: there is no justification for this phenomenon and we are obliged to take such issues extremely seriously. ...

All EU Member States have accepted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights also prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin and religion or belief.

The EU has furthermore adopted specific legislation on combating intolerance and hatred. ...

On 6 December 2018, the EU Member State Governments also sent a clear message by adopting a Council Declaration on the fight against anti-Semitism and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe. The Council notes that anti-Semitic hatred remains widespread and invites EU Member States to take measures to tackle anti-Semitism and improve the security of Jewish communities. ...

The countermeasures I have mentioned so far would, however, be insufficient without recognising the important role of education and youth work ...

It is important to bear in mind that the measures in place to fight hate crime can only fulfil their potential if victims report hate motivated harassment and violence to the police, and if police officers record such incidents as hate crimes. ...

In short, the responsibility rests with all of us – politicians, teachers, civil servants, students, parents and, where appropriate, judges and prosecutors – not to close our eyes or ears and pretend not to see injustice, discrimination or hatred. From the horrors of Auschwitz, the world learned its lesson and built an order of peace, founded upon human rights and international law. We are all committed to defending this.

Věra Jourová (Vice-President of the Commission): ... It is the duty of the EU to prevent history from repeating itself and to uphold the values upon which the Union is based. The Holocaust has shown us where anti-Semitism and racism can lead and its memory is at the very core of the European project of a Europe that protects its Jewish communities and all other minorities.

We have seen that fear and hatred against 'the other' has become normalised in recent years. It flourishes in mainstream media, in political debate and in the online world. It is a major challenge to our whole society and not only to the affected communities. ...

The adoption of the Council Declaration on combating anti-Semitism was a milestone. All Member States unanimously agreed on actions and were invited to develop national strategies. The Commission created a dedicated working group to ensure concrete follow-up to the Council declaration and support Member States and Jewish communities to work together on developing these strategies. ...

Distorting our common history has been one of the trademarks of fanning the flames of hatred and division, be it by third countries or within our own societies. Where today there are attempts to deny or distort the memory of the Holocaust, where people are vilified because they are Jews, this is where Europe is called into question. Attempts to distort

our history are threatening our foundations. Disinformation and fake news attack our past but also, and first of all, our present. ...

Roberta Metsola (on behalf of the PPE Group): Mr President, I have listened to many speeches, but one that will stay with me for a long time to come was given by Marian Turski last month, 75 years after he, weighing all of 32 kilos, walked out of Auschwitz. He called for an end to indifference. 'Auschwitz did not fall from the sky,' he said. It happened slowly, because too many people turned a blind eye to justice, too many people found comfort in scapegoats, and too many people accepted prejudiced laws.

That is why we fight anti-Semitism, racism and any hatred everywhere today, because in Europe we know only too well the depths of horror that man has sunk to and can sink to. If we teach people not only about what happened, but about how it happened, slowly through gradually increasing measures, then maybe we can truly learn the lessons of history, even when the voices of the survivors can be heard no more.

Now, today, we still witness attacks on Jews and synagogues in Europe, we still see the scapegoating going on, and we are still seeing states move slowly away from the values this Union was founded upon. ...

So we cannot be silent when Europeans live with a packed suitcase by their door, just in case. ... When we say 'never again', we must mean it, and that means taking action. ...

Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou (PPE): ... in the last decade anti-Semitism has raised its ugly head again in Europe. Sadly, though this is factually substantiated, according to a 2019 Eurobarometer survey there's a striking discrepancy in the perception of anti-Semitism. Almost 90% of Jews feel that anti-Semitism is on the rise, but only 36% of European citizens agree.

Europe cannot allow the poison of anti-Semitism to spread. It needs to support, it needs to protect its Jews and it needs to effectively combat anti-Semitic perpetrators, and there is no question that Hezbollah, Iran's most deadly proxy, is an indoctrinated, violent anti-Semitic group which poses serious threats to Jews in Europe and not just in Europe. Yet the European Union refuses to ... end this false distinction between the political wing and the military wing of Hezbollah ... This hypocrisy must end now. ...

Sylwia Spurek (S&D): ... research shows that anti-Semitic abuse and violence is increasing in the EU. ... But racism and anti-Semitism are still denied by many politicians, media and scientists all over Europe. ... It is unacceptable. The European Union urgently needs a strategy to fight anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia, to prevent and combat these phenomena and to protect human rights. ...

Věra Jourová: ... When you ask the Jewish citizen in the EU what is his or her main concern, the answer is security. When you ask the European people who are not of Jewish origin, they will say 'we have concerns about our health, our jobs, our family'. And this is really very alarming that the Jewish people have such an elementary fear and that they plan to leave Europe. Jewish people leaving Europe has never been a good sign, and this is not a Europe we want. ...

... I think it is absolutely intolerable that the Jewish communities have to finance their own security and the protection of Jewish premises, such as schools and synagogues. ...

We have to find a way how to explain to the younger generation what the Holocaust was, and to change the narrative, because we keep discussing about the results of the Holocaust, the horrifying statistical figures. But we have to start speaking seriously about the sources of the Holocaust. How it started ...

To read the full transcript see

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-02-11-ITM-013_EN.html

TOP

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

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

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill

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

Education (Assemblies) Bill

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

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

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

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

Scottish Parliament Information Centre Briefing

<https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdneq.azureedge.net/published/2020/2/13/Civil-Partnership--Scotland--Bill/SB%2020-15.pdf>

TOP

Consultations ** new or updated today

Harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education (closing date 27 March 2020)

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/76f6bdd3-bb14-4956-b089-cd1598323d55/consultation-on-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct-in-higher-education.pdf>

TOP

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