



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Marriage: Humanism

Rebecca Long Bailey (Labour) [23549] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, when the Government plans to bring forward legislative proposals to legalise humanist marriages in England and Wales.

Alex Chalk: The Government announced last June that the Law Commission will conduct a fundamental review of the law on how and where people can legally marry in England and Wales. As part of that review, the Government invited the Law Commission to make recommendations about how marriage by humanist and other non-religious belief organisations could be incorporated into a revised or new scheme for all marriages that is simple, fair and consistent.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-02/23549/>

Information about the Law Commission review can be read at <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/weddings/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Religious Hatred

Lord Vinson (Conservative) [HL1822] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Viscount Younger of Leckie on 3 February (HL727), what consideration they have given to requiring allegations of an offence of stirring up religious hatred to be supported by two witnesses, in order to restrict frivolous complaints.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist: It is an operational matter for the police to determine whether and how to investigate all incidents reported to them. The Crown Prosecution Service will also apply the Code for Crown Prosecutors to ensure a prosecution will not proceed where a complaint is deemed to be frivolous. Decisions to prosecute are furthermore subject to consideration under the Freedom of Expression defence contained in Section 29J of the Public Order Act 1986.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-24/HL1822/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-01-22/HL727/>

Marriage: Islam

Lord Beecham (Labour) [HL1706] To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to legislate to ensure that women in Islamic faith marriages can seek redress through the courts in the event that the marriage breaks down.

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 that it should be an offence for religious celebrants to carry out 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 began its weddings project in July last year. 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/2020-02-24/HL1706/>

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_CPFGR_Report_into_Sharia_Law_in_the_UK_WEB.pdf

Information about the Law Commission weddings project can be read at

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/weddings/>

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House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Agricultural Products

Jo Stevens (Labour) [25142] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Israeli Government's ban on the export of some types of Palestinian agricultural produce to the Kingdom of Jordan on the Israel-Palestine peace process.

Jo Stevens (Labour) [25143] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what diplomatic steps he is taking to help end the dispute between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority on trade of agricultural products.

James Cleverly: The UK is concerned about the impact of recent Israeli trade restrictions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We are committed to supporting Palestinian economic development. The UK Government strongly supports the principle of free trade. Businesses should be free to import Palestinian products

without barriers. Her Majesty's Ambassador to Israel has raised this issue with the Government of Israel, most recently on 12 February. We welcome the agreement reached by the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, on 20 February, to lift their respective trade restrictions. We urge both sides to ensure the continued implementation of this agreement.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-04/25142/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-04/25143/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1814] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel concerning the blinding of a nine year old Palestinian child by Israeli forces in East Jerusalem on 15 February.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not raised this case specifically, the UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which Israel Defense Forces police non-violent protests and the border areas. We have encouraged the Israeli authorities to carry out transparent investigations into whether the use of live fire had been appropriate. We have also stressed the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children. We call on Israel to adhere to the principles of necessity and proportionality when defending its legitimate security interest.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-24/HL1814/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1817] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the policies of the government of Israel concerning the shooting of Palestinian children.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The British Government is very concerned at any instances of Palestinians killed and injured by Israel Defense Forces in the West Bank and Gaza. We have raised the issue with the Israeli authorities, encouraging them to carry out transparent investigations into whether use of live fire had been appropriate. We have also stressed the importance of the Israel security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children. We call on Israel to adhere to the principles of necessity and proportionality when defending its legitimate security interest.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-24/HL1817/>

Palestinians: Travel Restrictions

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1818] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel concerning the barring of the Palestinian Governor of East Jerusalem from entering the West Bank and the order preventing him from communicating with the Palestinian Authority.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we are aware of the decision, we have not made any representations to the Israeli authorities on this issue. We remain deeply concerned about restrictions on freedom of movement within the West Bank,

including to and from East Jerusalem. Through our Embassy in Tel Aviv we have lobbied the authorities on the issue of movement and access, most recently on 17 December 2019.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-24/HL1818/>

Jerusalem: Religious Buildings

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1819] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they will take to protect the status of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the freedom of Muslims to worship at that site.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The holy sites of Jerusalem hold particular significance for many groups around the globe, especially the three Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The UK is committed to working with all parties to maintain calm, avoid provocation and uphold the Status Quo in order to ensure the safety and security of Al Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount and all who worship and visit there. We support the freedom of Muslims to worship at Al Haram Al Sharif. In our meetings with the Israeli authorities we regularly raise the need to respect the status quo of the holy sites in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv did so most recently on 16 October 2019.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-24/HL1819/>

Gaza: Agriculture

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1895] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they intend to take to protect agricultural lands in Gaza from incursions by Israeli forces and the destruction of Gaza farmland.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of such reports. Agricultural goods are some of the only Gazan exports permitted to cross the border into Israel. We continue to raise with Israeli counterparts our concerns about Israeli action.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-25/HL1895/>

Jerusalem: Religious Freedom

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1896] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the reported closure of a Palestinian bakery in East Jerusalem that supplied food to worshippers attending the Al Asqa mosque.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not made any representations on this specific case, the UK is committed to working with all parties to maintain calm, avoid provocation and uphold the status quo to ensure the safety and the security of the Al Haram Al Sharif / Temple Mount and all who worship there. In our meetings with the Israeli authorities we regularly raise the need to respect the status quo of the holy sites in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv last raised this issue with the Israeli authorities on 16 October 2019.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-25/HL1896/>

Jerusalem: Excavation

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1897] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they intend to take to protect the homes of Palestinians in East Jerusalem whose land is being undermined by Israeli archaeological excavations.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We regularly make clear our serious concerns about the situation in East Jerusalem to the Israeli authorities, both bilaterally and in co-

operation with EU partners. We are strongly opposed to any attempts to change the facts on the ground in the East Jerusalem.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-25/HL1897/>

Israel: Occupied Territories

Baroness tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL1898] To ask Her Majesty's Government what responsibilities they have under international law to ensure that Israel complies with the Geneva Conventions in the occupied territories of Palestine.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK remains of the view that Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) amounts to an 'occupation' which is governed by relevant rules of international law, including the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to which Israel is a state party. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-02-25/HL1898/>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Updated Guidance: Foreign Travel Advice: Israel

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

Updated Guidance: Foreign Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

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

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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>

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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>

Hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland: an independent review (closing date 31 March 2020)
<https://www.hatecrimereviewni.org.uk/sites/hcr/files/media-files/Consultation%20Paper%20Feb%202020.pdf>

Amendments to the organ donation regulations (Wales) (closing date 30 April 2020)
<https://gov.wales/amendments-organ-donation-regulations>

Regulating Independent Educational Institutions (closing date 8 May 2020)
<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/regulating-independent-education-institutions/>

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