



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

## Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

## Home Affairs

### UK Parliament, House of Commons Library

#### **Coronavirus: Powers to direct between burials and cremation**

The Government's new emergency powers might have consequences for conducting funerals. In particular, there are concerns that the new powers, which were enacted on 25 March, could result in a body being cremated against the wishes of the deceased or their family. Cremation is against the requirements of some religions. The Government says that this isn't what's intended. ...

If the powers are activated, the [Government foresees](#) that local authorities may choose, for example, to direct local funeral directors, mortuaries owners, crematoria owners and others, to streamline the death management process.

This may include an increase in the operating times of crematoria, directing companies to use their vehicles to move bodies, or directing others not directly involved in the funeral sector, to provide necessary support.

Powers to decide between burial or cremation

One of the powers in the Act would enable a local or national authority to [direct whether a deceased person must be buried or cremated](#).

Following an amendment to the legislation as it passed through Parliament, the Act now specifies that any local or national authority exercising this power (if it is activated) must "[have regard to the desirability of](#)" disposing of a dead person's body in accordance with the person's wishes, or otherwise in accordance with the person's religion or beliefs, if known. ...

Under existing [public health legislation](#), local authorities must not arrange for a body to be cremated if contrary to the wishes of the deceased. Under the new powers, this would be suspended. However, the Government has stated that personal choice for body disposal will be [respected as far as possible](#). ...

The Government has said that the powers of direction will be used "[only in the most extreme situations where there is a risk to public health](#)", and only "when scientific evidence and operational advice suggests that it is necessary." ...

Could this mean enforced cremation?

Some faith groups, including Muslims and Jews, for whom burial, rather than cremation, is a religious requirement, have raised concerns about the prospect of cremation against the

wishes of the deceased and their families. ...

In the House of Commons, Penny Mordaunt, the Paymaster General ... said she could not foresee any circumstances in which a person would be cremated against their wishes. She also said the Government had worked with faith groups on the issue.

In the House of Lords, Lord Bethell, a junior Minister at the Department of Health and Social Care, stressed that local authorities will have discretion, "[to make arrangements with the communities that they know best.](#)"

Lord Bethell said that faith communities will be involved in drawing up the statutory guidance that will be issued before any direction affecting burial or cremation is made.

**To read the full briefing see**

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/home-affairs/communities/coronavirus-powers-to-direct-between-burials-and-cremation/>

TOP

## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### Israel: Coronavirus

**Emily Thornberry (Labour)** [32093] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Israel on the plans that that country has in place to repatriate Israeli nationals from overseas; and whether the UK can learn lessons from that approach.

**James Cleverly:** We have not had discussions on this issue. We are working closely with local authorities, commercial airlines and other diplomatic missions to enable British people to get home. Our consular team is working around the clock to provide support, advice and information. The situation is fast moving, and our advice at this time is for British nationals to secure safe accommodation and to speak to their tour operator, airline and insurance company to discuss the options available to them.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-19/32093/>

#### Middle East: Antisemitism

**Siobhan Baillie (Conservative)** [32290] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his (a) Jordanian, (b) Egyptian, (c) Saudi Arabian counterparts and (d) the Palestinian Authority on the removal of reported antisemitic ideology from national curriculums.

**James Cleverly:** The Government is committed to combatting the rise of anti-Semitism in all its forms and we have a regular, frank and open dialogue with international partners on this issue. The International Development Secretary reiterated our concerns about allegations of incitement in Palestinian textbooks in a call to the Palestinian Education Minister just last month, during which they discussed the Palestinian Authority's review of the content of Palestinian textbooks. The Foreign Secretary discussed freedom of religion or belief with the Saudi authorities during his visit to Riyadh on 4 and 5 March. Saudi Arabia has committed to several education reform programmes including the revision of textbooks. Although we do not believe that Jordan's curriculum contains materials which promote hatred in any form, we have a major programme in support of education in Jordan. My predecessor met the Jordanian Minister of Education in January. We have a regular, positive engagement with the Egyptian authorities on freedom of

religion or belief. Our Honourary Consul in Alexandria attended a service at the Synagogue of Alexandria in February to mark its reopening after refurbishment.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-19/32290/>

### State Retirement Pensions

**Philip Davies (Conservative)** [33472] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people aged 100 years old and over receive the state pension in each country outside the UK.

**Guy Opperman:** The table below provides how many people aged 100 years old and over, who receive the State Pension in each country outside the UK.

	Caseload		Caseload
Abroad not known	20	Latvia	-
Alderney	-	Lithuania	-
Australia	340	Luxembourg	-
Austria	-	Monaco	-
Bangladesh	-	Montserrat	-
Barbados	10	New Zealand	150
Belgium	-	Norway	-
Benin	-	Not known	20
Bermuda	-	Pakistan	20
Brazil	-	Poland	-
Canada	190	Portugal	-
Cayman Islands	-	Republic of Ireland	100
Chile	-	Republic of Yemen	10
Cyprus	10	Sierra Leone	-
Denmark	-	Somalia	-
Djibouti	-	South Africa	30
Equatorial Guinea	-	Spain	50
France	30	St Kitts and Nevis	-
Germany	10	St Lucia	-
Greece	-	St Vincent & The Grenadines	-
Guernsey	10	Sweden	-
Hong Kong	-	Switzerland	-
India	-	Thailand	-
Israel	10	The Netherlands	-
Italy	20	Trinidad and Tobago	-
Jamaica	70	United Arab Emirates	-
Jersey	10	USA	210
Kenya	-	Zimbabwe	-
		<b>Total</b>	<b>1,390</b>

Source: DWP Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, August 2019.

Caseload figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. Caseloads identified with ‘-’ are negligible, but non-zero. Caseloads exclude suspended cases.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-23/33472/>

## House of Lords Written Answer

### Israel: Palestinians

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL2520] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about reports that an Israeli policeman fired shots at Palestinian children in a school playground through the bars of the school gate.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We have repeatedly made clear to the Israeli authorities our longstanding concerns about the use of excessive force, not limited to the use of live ammunition. 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.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-03-11/HL2520/>

## United Nations

### COVID-19: UN envoy hails strong Israel-Palestine cooperation

Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, has praised the coordination between the Israeli and Palestine authorities in reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic. ...

In a statement released on Friday, the coordination and cooperation established between Israel and Palestine, with regard to tackling COVID-19, was described as "excellent".

The Israeli and Palestinian authorities are continuing to coordinate their responses closely and constructively, the statement said, which is a major factor in the level of disease containment achieved so far.

The Israeli government has reportedly approved measures to limit the movement of people and trade, including closing schools and banning mass gatherings, whilst the Palestinian Prime Minister is reported to have ordered a lockdown on Sunday night.

Latest World Health Organization figures show more than 3,300 confirmed cases in Israel, and more than 80 in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Since the beginning of the crisis, Israel has allowed the entry of critical supplies and equipment into Gaza: examples of critical supplies include swabs for collection of samples and other laboratory supplies required for COVID-19 testing, and Personal Protective Equipment to protect health workers.

The statement also noted Israel's cooperation in allowing health workers and other personnel involved in the COVID-19 response to move in and out of the West Bank and Gaza.

**To read the full press release see**

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060572>

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>

[TOP](#)

## **Consultations**

\*\* new or updated today

### **\*\* closes in 2 days**

**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>

**Electing a more diverse Assembly** (closing date 22 April 2020)

<http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?ID=389>

**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/>

**Protecting places of worship** (closing date 10 May 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protecting-places-of-worship-consultation>

[TOP](#)

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