



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Antisemitism

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [34967] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reasons his Department has not brought forward legislative proposals to make Holocaust denial a criminal offence.

Luke Hall: The Government deplores attempts to deny the Holocaust, including those views expressed in a pseudo-intellectual manner. We understand why some European countries, because of their particular histories, have expressly legislated against Holocaust denial, but successive governments have taken the view that criminalising Holocaust denial in the UK would represent an unnecessary infringement of freedom of expression. It is of course the case that if Holocaust denial is expressed in a way that is threatening, abusive, or insulting and incites racial hatred, or is likely to do so, then that would be unlawful under the Public Order Act 1986.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-25/34967/>

Hate Crime: Coronavirus

Neil Coyle (Labour) [34991] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to (a) protect and (b) support people subject to (i) racial abuse and (ii) other hate crimes as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

Luke Hall: The Government takes hate crime and discrimination of any kind very seriously. We are a tolerant and welcoming multicultural society and we have one of the strongest legal frameworks in the world to report, record and prosecute hate crime. I would encourage anyone who experiences hate crime to report it to the police.

Government's Hate Crime Action Plan published in October 2018 sets out a comprehensive programme of work across Government and the police. We fund hate crime reporting platforms, including True Vision, and we continue to engage

with communities of all backgrounds and local leaders including councils and the police to make sure we are aware of any concerns communities may have and can provide targeted support.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-25/34991/>

The Action Plan referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748175/Hate_crime_refresh_2018_FINAL_WEB.PDF

The True Vision website, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.report-it.org.uk/>

Charities: Coronavirus

Afzal Khan (Labour) [37973] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on support for charity workers in faith organisations through the package of support announced for charities.

John Whittingdale: We are proactively engaging across the sector, to maintain a complete picture of the impact of coronavirus, and working to identify the additional support charities require through this time of financial instability. The £750 million package of grants announced by the Chancellor on 8 April is a substantial package of targeted support for charities and their staff working on the frontline of responding to Coronavirus. Charity workers can also make use of other measures announced by the Chancellor including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

The Government funding will be allocated based on evidence of service need. No allocations of government funds have been made yet but departments are working at pace to identify priority recipients. Once funding has been allocated, eligible Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise organisations will be able to start accessing funds within weeks.

More information will be announced shortly

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37973/>

Marriage: Coronavirus

Catherine West (Labour) [37869] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if the Government will extend the validity period of marriage notices issued in 2020 by 12 months to allow weddings cancelled as a result of the outbreak of covid-19 to take place.

Alex Chalk: The Government acknowledges the significant upheaval that Covid-19 is causing for couples who were looking to marry at this time. The requirement to solemnize a marriage within twelve months of giving notice to marry is set out in primary legislation and would require primary legislation to amend.

We are exploring what changes might be possible in relation to marriages at this time, and in line with Public Health England guidance on social distancing.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37869/>

Broadcasting: Equality

Yasmin Qureshi (Labour) [37560] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to page four of the report published by Ofcom on 18 September 2019 entitled Diversity and equal opportunities in television, whether the Government has received representations from Ofcom on powers to collect information from broadcasters on the characteristics of (a) age, (b) sexual orientation and (c) religion or belief.

John Whittingdale: The Government has received representations from Ofcom

regarding powers to collect information on additional diversity characteristics. Under the Communications Act 2003, Ofcom requires data from broadcasters related to equality of opportunity between men and women, people of different racial groups, and for disabled persons.

The Government is committed to supporting the broadcasting sector in reflecting and providing for the whole of the UK population and encourages broadcasters to provide data to Ofcom on all the protected characteristics.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37560/>

The report referred to above can be read at

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/166807/Diversity-in-TV-2019.pdf

Scottish Parliament Motion

S5M-21568 Maurice Golden (Conservative): Pulling Together Supporting the East Renfrewshire Jewish Community – That the Parliament congratulates Pulling Together on its efforts to support vulnerable members of the Jewish community in East Renfrewshire during the COVID-19 outbreak; understands that it is the largest group supporting the Jewish community in the UK; notes that the group has been instrumental in ensuring vulnerable residents have access to both food and medical supplies through the work of local volunteers; further notes that the group anticipates an increase in demand for its services and will act to ensure priority is given to those most at risk; is pleased that the group has a strong focus on the safety of its volunteers, including providing safety and cleaning equipment, along with clear instructions on best practice in hand hygiene; believes that both Pulling Together and other similar support groups serve as an example of communities at their best, and wishes Pulling Together continued success in providing its much-needed support.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-21568>

Welsh Government

Section 58 and Schedule 28 to the Coronavirus Act 2020: Local death management

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-04/local-death-management-guidance-for-local-authorities.pdf>

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Holocaust

See the House of Commons written answer on “Antisemitism” included in the Home Affairs Section above.

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House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Occupied Territories: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas (Green) [37567] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the potential effect of (a) the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip, (b) the occupation of the West Bank, (c) the capacity of healthcare systems, (d) the availability of medical supplies, (e) access to water and sanitation facilities and (f) people's ability to self-isolate on the response to the covid-19 outbreak in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Gaza: Coronavirus

Catherine West (Labour) [37841] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has with his Israeli counterpart on the outbreak of covid-19 outbreak in Gaza; and whether he has made representations to that counterpart on importing medical support to the Palestinian territories.

James Cleverly: We are deeply concerned about the impact of a COVID-19 outbreak in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly in Gaza. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem are in regular contact with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities respectively. Both report good cooperation between the two entities in response to COVID-19. UN agencies, the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government are working together to ensure that essential medical supplies and staff are able to access Gaza.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37567/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37841/>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Palestinians: Coronavirus

Afzal Khan (Labour) [37772] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what additional support the Government is providing to the Palestinian authorities in Gaza to help the region prepare for a potential outbreak of covid-19.

Gaza: Coronavirus

Afzal Khan (Labour) [37862] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the availability of healthcare facilities in Gaza in respect of the covid-19 outbreak in that area.

Afzal Khan (Labour) [37863] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether her Department plans to provide support to Gaza to help tackle the outbreak of covid-19 in that area.

James Cleverly: The UK has pledged £744 million to support the global humanitarian response to COVID-19, including the response in Gaza. We are providing additional vital support in the Occupied Palestinian Territories by providing £840,000 to the World Health Organisation and UN Children's Fund to purchase and co-ordinate the delivery of medical equipment, treat critical care patients, train frontline public health personnel and scale up laboratory testing capacity.

The UN assesses that although the current number of detected cases remains relatively low, the capacity of the Palestinian health system to cope with an expected increase in COVID-19 cases is poor. The situation is particularly severe in Gaza, where the health system has shortages in specialised staff, drugs and

equipment. We continue to monitor the situation and are working closely with the UN and the international community to ensure a co-ordinated and effective response.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37772/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37862/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37863/>

Palestinians: Coronavirus

Afzal Khan (Labour) [37859] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the ability of the Palestinian Authority to respond to the covid-19 pandemic.

James Cleverly: We are deeply concerned about the impact of a COVID-19 outbreak in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and especially in Gaza. However, both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities report good cooperation in response to COVID-19. UN agencies, the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government are working together to ensure that essential medical supplies and staff are able to access Gaza. The UK's \$1 million funding contribution will enable the World Health Organisation and UNICEF to purchase and co-ordinate the delivery of medical equipment, treat critical care patients, train frontline public health personnel and scale up laboratory testing capacity.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37859/>

West Bank: Coronavirus

Louise Haigh (Labour) [37807] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to his Israeli counterparts on the decision to close the first-aid centre in Ibziq.

James Cleverly: We raised our concerns about the demolition of the health centre in Ibziq at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East on 23 April. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice is harmful to the peace process. We are particularly concerned that demolitions are continuing at this time.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-20/37807/>

House of Commons Library Briefing

Coronavirus and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/world-affairs/middle-east/coronavirus-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>

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>

A proud partnership, a cherished friendship – UK and Israel united for 70 years

Anniversaries are a good time to reflect, to look back on how events have shaped us and dwell on happy memories. They are also a time to look to the future, set goals, and make plans for the future. And it is with that sense of optimism, this week, that we mark the 70th anniversary of the UK opening its embassy in Tel Aviv, beginning the UK's diplomatic relations with Israel.

Over those 70 years we have seen engagements between Her Majesty the Queen and Israeli Presidents Haim Herzog, Ezer Weizman and Shimon Peres. In 2018 HRH Prince William visited Israel and met Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Rivlin, Holocaust survivors, activists and even carved out some time to meet Israeli Eurovision sensation Netta. The Prime Minister was pleased to host Prime Minister Netanyahu at Downing Street last year, while earlier this year, HRH The Prince of Wales visited Israel to speak at a Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial ceremony and joined world leaders in Jerusalem to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz.

I know what an amazing place Israel is ... A country with antiquity and modernity side by side, things that seem familiar to my British eyes and things which are fascinating and unique. A country proud of its modern science and technology sectors and also home to some of the most holy places in the world.

I had hoped that my work as minister responsible for the Middle East and North Africa might give me the chance to go back to a fantastic fish restaurant on the waterfront at Jaffa, listen to the call to evening prayer from the mosque while watching the sun set over the Mediterranean Sea. Unfortunately Covid-19 means that I, like people in Tel Aviv, will have to wait before dining there again.

But even in these challenging times, this anniversary week gives us both cause for optimism. The UK and Israel are working side by side in the fight against coronavirus, with our top health and scientific advisers sharing information and exchanging valuable insights into how to manage and ultimately beat the pandemic. Our respective world-class hospitals and laboratories are working together to support the development of antibody treatments for patients and discussing ground-breaking innovations, from tracing apps to potential vaccines.

Of course, the ties between UK and Israel go far beyond scientific cooperation. ... The UK is Israel's biggest trading partner in Europe ... UK-Israeli trade and collaboration touches every aspect of our lives and helps build a more prosperous future for both our countries. Of course, the prosperity of Israel and the UK is inextricably linked to the stability of the wider Middle East. I am a firm believer that a negotiated agreement between Israel and the Palestinians for a two-state solution is the best way to secure enduring stability and success. As Israel's new government gets to work, I encourage both sides to focus on that great, if sometimes elusive, prize; sustainable peace. I urge both to continue to build on the constructive collaboration that they have shown during this pandemic and find ways to return to the table. I hope that steps on the road towards lasting peace are taken, and pathways that might lead away from that goal are avoided.

Much changes over a 70 year period but some things do not change. We will continue to cherish our friendship with Israel, stand united in the struggle against the insidious forces of hate and antisemitism and work towards an even brighter and better future for us all.

Here's to the next 70 years! Am Yisrael Chai.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-proud-partnership-a-cherished-friendship-uk-and-israel-united-for-70-years>

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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>

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes in 2 days**

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>

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill (closing date not stated)

The Scottish Government welcomes your views on any aspect of the Bill as it begins its passage through Parliament. Please send any queries titled 'Hate Crime Bill Launch' to ConnectedCommunities@gov.scot

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