



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Churches: Coronavirus

Alexander Stafford (Conservative) [42228] To ask the right hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, for what reasons churches and other places of worship were not listed as essential services in the covid-19 lockdown guidance.

Andrew Selous: Following the address to the nation made by the Prime Minister on the 23rd March, the Church of England took the difficult decision that it would ask this clergy to close their parish churches to the public due to the unprecedented high risk of transmission of the covid-19 virus. While the church buildings and halls were shut, their congregations have continued, where possible, to live out their vocation and mission to serve the needs of their local communities during the lockdown period.

The Government listed the clergy as key workers during the medical emergency, and it has enabled them to continue to meet the needs of their communities right across the country, serving as chaplains, officiating at funerals, administering last rites, operating food banks and other essential community services.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-01/42228/>

The address referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-23-march-2020>

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House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Coronavirus

David Jones (Conservative) [41399] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what support her Department is providing to the Palestinian Authority to tackle the covid-19 pandemic in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Gaza: Coronavirus

James Murray (Labour) [41610] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the effect of Israel's blockade of Gaza on Gaza's capacity to respond to the covid-19 outbreak.

James Cleverly: The UK has pledged £744 million to support the global humanitarian response to COVID-19. We have delivered additional vital support in the Occupied Palestinian Territories by providing funding to WHO 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.

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 response.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-29/41399/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-29/41610/>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

James Murray (Labour) [41611] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether she holds information on the proportion of humanitarian assistance sent to Gaza which is delivered through non-governmental organisations.

James Cleverly: DFID provides support to the health system in Gaza and contributes to the provision of emergency food aid for around 1.2 million vulnerable people.

DFID does not hold information on what proportion of overall humanitarian assistance is delivered through NGOs.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-29/41611/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Israel: West Bank

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (Liberal Democrat): To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the announcement by the government of Israel of its intention to commence discussions from 1 July on applying Israeli sovereignty to Jewish settlements and other territory in the occupied West Bank. ...

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon): My Lords, we are

deeply concerned by reports that the new Israeli Government coalition have reached an agreement which may pave the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The United Kingdom's position is clear: any unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and contrary to international law.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: I thank the Minister for his Answer, but “no country, however large, can dismember its neighbour and break international law without consequences.”

These are the words of Boris Johnson when Foreign Secretary, in an article published on 22 February 2018 criticising Russia for its annexation of Crimea. The Minister accepts, as I understand it, that the possible annexation by the Israeli Government of land on the West Bank would likewise be illegal, but otherwise the Government's response is an exercise in hand-wringing, as evidenced by the response today and by the answer given yesterday to the Written Question put down by my noble friend Lady Northover.

The possibility of a just, two-state solution is being dismantled before our eyes in favour of a one-state imposition, all endorsed by President Trump. What is the Government's position? Do they accept the inevitability of annexation or will they condemn and seek to prevent it? We are entitled to know; the Palestinians are entitled to know as well. ...

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, the UK position is absolutely clear. Any unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel, as I have said, would be damaging to the restart of any peace negotiations and, as I say again, contrary to international law.

Lord Mann (Non-affiliated): Calling for harm to Jews, holding the British-Jewish community responsible for the actions of Israel, suggestions of disloyalty, conspiracy or undue financial power and Nazi comparators are all outwith the agreed IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. Does the Minister agree that robust criticism and debate, while vital for democracy, are undermined by those who demean and dehumanise through hateful and abusive language?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I agree with the noble Lord. As he will know, the Government are a strong supporter of the IHRA definition; in that regard, I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Pickles. The United Kingdom stands very much on the sentiments that the noble Lord has expressed. Any kind of bigotry or hate against any community is unacceptable.

Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom (Conservative): My Lords, the last time I was in Israel, I told the mayor of Jerusalem that the settlements were a mistake. He said: “What do you want me to do, police the ethnicity of land sales between Israelis and Palestinians?” If most Palestinians recognise that a land swap for the settlement blocks is the pragmatic way forward, should not we in the UK be doing the same?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, as my noble friend will know, our long-standing position remains that the United Kingdom believes in a peace negotiation, a settlement between both sides based primarily on the 1967 borders, with agreed land swaps, as would allow understanding of the position on the ground. Our position in that regard has not changed. ...

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale (Labour): My Lords, does the Minister agree that everyone who wishes the best of futures for both Israel and the Palestinian people should be giving all the support they can to the people trying to bring about a two-state solution, and that therefore no support for any unilateral action should be given? It does not matter who is taking the unilateral action, whether it is Israel, the Palestinian people or any other actor in this conflict. Real friends of Israel should surely be against any unilateral action, which is bound to be only an obstacle on the road to peace, and that should apply to land annexation by Israel or calls from the Palestinians for boycotts and sanctions against Israel. Can the Minister confirm that the policy of Her Majesty's Government is still to do everything to help bring about an agreed two-state solution for both parties?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I have already stated the Government's position and I am happy to restate it. We believe in a two-state negotiated peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, the Israel Attorney-General's office has warned the Israeli Prime Minister that annexation could trigger an International Criminal Court investigation into senior army officers and others. Will the Government co-operate if such an investigation occurs?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I am not going to speculate on what may or may not happen. It remains very clear that we support a negotiated settlement between both sides, as I have said. As for anything which the ICC brings forward, we are supporters of the ICC, as the noble Baroness will know.

Lord Polak (Conservative): ... At his last speech to the Knesset on 5 October 1995 on the ratification of the Oslo accord, Yitzhak Rabin stated: "The security border of the State of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley".

Just one month later, the noble Lord, Lord Campbell, and others signed an Early Day Motion as a tribute to the murdered Prime Minister, describing him as "a man of great courage and vision who led his country ... along the path towards peace".

The noble Lord was right to do so then and, I guess, would do so again. Does the Minister agree that the Council for Arab-British Understanding would be fulfilling its mission and be in tune with government policy by writing to the Palestinian leadership and other Arab states urging the Palestinians to sit down and talk peace directly with the Israelis?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I agree with my noble friend on the vision and the courage of the sadly passed-away Prime Minister Rabin. He brought peace to the region and his vision is what is needed now. Of course, I support all negotiated settlements, and we call upon both sides to sit down together and reach an agreement that works for Israel and for the Palestinians.

Baroness Deech (Crossbench): This proposal—so far it is only a proposal—over long-disputed territory has been taken out of context. I hope the Minister appreciates that. It relates to the Jordan valley, which has always been part of likely land swaps. It forms part of an overall vision to have a Palestinian state in the remainder of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The outright rejection of the entire US plan and adherence to past, failed plans are certain to condemn all sides to continued conflict. The Saudis have called on the Palestinian leadership to engage in direct negotiations with Israel on the merits of the US proposals. Can the Minister tell the House whether the UK Government have made representations to the Palestinian National Authority to do the same and get on with negotiations?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I assure the noble Baroness that we implore both sides to sit down and negotiate so that an agreement can be reached in the interests of both peoples.

Lord Turnberg (Labour): My Lords, it is clear that annexation does not mean the takeover of the West Bank, but the takeover of some parts that have been on the table in every suggested peace deal for decades—namely, in land swaps such as in the Jordan river valley, as has been mentioned, in exchange for land elsewhere. Does the Minister agree that this is a vital opportunity for Mr Abbas to negotiate again for a two-state solution?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, I agree that what we want to see and what is required—it has been a long-standing position, and we remain steadfast—is a negotiated two-state solution that works for Israel in terms of its security concerns, and provides for a sovereign Palestinian nation.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2020-05-06/debates/2193977F-65CA-4515-A426-57A85ECAD494/IsraelWestBank>

The article referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/four-years-since-the-illegal-annexation-of-crimea-article-by-boris-johnson>

The written answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-28/HL3515/>

The Early Day Motion referred to above can be read at

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/10577/prime-minister-yitzhak-rabin>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL3286] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that Israeli settlers are breaking quarantine measures to spit at and attack Palestinians and their property; and what steps they intend to take to protect Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank in response.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are concerned by reports that settler violence is continuing at this time. We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians and we have stressed the importance of the Israel Defense Forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-21/HL3286/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL3288] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the reports that Israeli settlers have built new outposts in the West Bank during the COVID-19 lockdown; and what steps they intend to take in response.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not made an assessment of these reports, we are clear that Israeli outposts in the West Bank, which are illegal under international law and Israeli law, should be removed.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-21/HL3288/>

Gaza: Agriculture

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL3289] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that Israeli aircraft have sprayed toxic herbicides on to crops near the border fence in the east of Gaza City and damaged farmlands; and what steps they intend to take in response.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Whilst we have not made an assessment of these reports, we are troubled by reports of assaults on farmers and vandalism of agricultural land. 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/2020-04-21/HL3289/>

Israel: Palestinians

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL3317] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether all or any of the 180 Palestinian children reportedly detained by the Israeli Authorities have been released since 5 April; and if not, what steps they intend to take.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK has serious concerns about the continued

reports of ill-treatment of Palestinian minors in Israeli military detention. We remain committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to the practices surrounding children in detention in the country. We welcomed progress made with recent Israeli policy amendments. We continue to fund projects providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers. Specifically, we advocate for the Israeli authorities to inform more consistently detainees of their legal rights. We continue to make representations to the Israeli authorities on this issue. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv did so most recently on 16 December 2019.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-21/HL3317/>

Israel: Palestinians

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL3318] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the government of Israel about the repeated arrests of the Palestinian Authority Governor of East Jerusalem and reports of beatings and maltreatment of another Palestinian Authority official.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: While we have not made representations on the arrests of the Palestinian Authority (PA) Governor of East Jerusalem, the British Consul General in Jerusalem, alongside a number of other representatives, met the PA Minister for Jerusalem Affairs by videoconference on 7 April. They expressed concern at the 3 April raid by Israeli police on his home, his detention and questioning about his work to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in East Jerusalem. We remain concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary rather than as routine practice and as a preventive rather than a punitive measure. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law and either charge or release detainees.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-21/HL3318/>

Jerusalem: Coronavirus

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL3319] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to discuss with the government of Israel the health needs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic of the Silwan neighborhood in East Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are deeply concerned about the impact of a COVID-19 outbreak in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). 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 in response to COVID-19 though we continue to call on both parties to avoid any provocative action which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical. UN agencies, the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government are working together to ensure that essential medical supplies and staff reach the OPTs. 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/Lords/2020-04-21/HL3319/>

Israeli Settlements

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat) [HL3515] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the announcement by the government of Israel of its

intention to commence discussions from 1 July on applying Israeli sovereignty to Jewish settlements and other territory in the occupied West Bank.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As we made clear at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 23 April, we are deeply concerned by reports that the new Israeli Government coalition has reached an agreement which paves the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The UK position is clear: any unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and contrary to international law.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-28/HL3515/>

United Nations

Israel's Planned Annexation of Occupied Territory Threatens Two-State Solution, Palestinian Rights Committee Warns, Urges Global Community to Counter Threat

... Even during the unprecedented health emergency, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to entrench the illegal occupation and openly announced its intention to annex large areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, while continuing the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

It falls on the international community to rally our support and solidarity behind the Palestinian people to prevent annexation, which constitutes a grave breach of international law and flagrant violation of UN resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which calls for an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and the fulfilment of the rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence. The prohibition on acquisition of territory by force is absolute in the UN Charter. ...

The Committee calls on Israel to heed to the Secretary-General's recent call for a global ceasefire. It also calls on Israel to heed the long-standing demand for a halt to its illegal actions and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, including all measures aimed at entrenching the occupation and annexing territory. The Committee also calls on Israel, in accordance with its international law obligations, to ensure the full respect of the human rights of the Palestinian civilian population under its control and to provide humanitarian access and assistance, including to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We in the United Nations ... must do our part and prevent the gross injustice of occupation and annexation. The Committee calls on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and take urgent action to counteract the threat of annexation.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/gapal1432.doc.htm>

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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**

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 28 June 2020)

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

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill (closing date 24 July 2020)

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/115038.aspx>

Legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics [Wales] (closing date 28 July 2020)

<https://gov.wales/legislative-proposals-religion-values-and-ethics>

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