



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Weddings

Jeremy Balfour (Conservative): As the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government will be aware, registrars will issue wedding certificates so that people can get married. However, places of worship and most venues and hotels are still closed. Given the First Minister's announcement, when is it likely that weddings will be able to take place, either in a place of worship or a hotel or venue?

Reply from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government

(Aileen Campbell): In many respects, it is very difficult to give a definitive date for when those things can start to happen, but it is clear that the need to make a balanced judgment on the evidence and the continued efforts to suppress the spread of the virus is what is motivating the sequence of those decisions. That is a very difficult and delicate balance and we have articulated that within the document, "Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis", which was published today. We need to think ahead about when we might be able to get to a position when we can open places of worship and other business premises. How those family gatherings can be safely configured also needs to be considered.

Although that does not necessarily give any comfort and there is no definitive date as to when weddings might be able to take place, we are absolutely aware of the need to give people certainty and an understanding of when they can start to plan some of those events. The need to suppress the spread of the pandemic, however, has to govern those decisions. As the First Minister said, we need to make sure that there are no bridges by which the disease can spread. We will continue to work and engage with our faith groups and churches to make sure that they understand what they might need to do so that their congregations can meet safely, when they start to return to their places of worship.

We have engaged with our faith groups to try to find and support other ways by which people can observe their faith and feel that connection, which is so important, particularly when people are in lockdown. We will continue to keep the member and the population informed, but we have to make sure that we are governed by the evidence and the information, that we make a balanced judgment and continue to

work with the groups that have an interest in weddings and other celebrations.

Jeremy Balfour: I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware that weddings and other forms of public worship vary in size and type of service. Will there be a different standard for smaller weddings compared with larger weddings, and will churches and other places of worship be able to open in different ways, depending on how many people attend the venue?

Reply from Aileen Campbell: We are continuing to engage with our faith groups. At the start of the pandemic, I endeavoured to call as many of our faith leaders as possible, because we knew that it would have a real impact on the observance of faith. At this point in time, when people are feeling isolated and removed from their family, they will often look to their faith to find some support, but the ability to do so physically is no longer there. Therefore, we have engaged with our faith groups to make sure that we can move forward safely.

Worship and ceremonies are listed in the document that has been published today, but we have to be careful that we do not put people under any increased risk. That is why we will continue to work with our faith leaders in order that they can put in place some of the measures that are necessary for gatherings to happen safely. At the moment, that will not happen any time soon. This afternoon, the First Minister talked about the very gradual easing of restrictions, and when we can do so more generally, we will continue to work with our faith groups in order to move forward safely. We will keep Jeremy Balfour and others informed as the thinking on the issue progresses.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12652&i=114480#ScotParlOR>

The document referred to above can be read at

<https://tinyurl.com/ybnzwamc>

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Israel

Scottish Parliament Motion

S5M-21818 Jamie Greene (Conservative): Israel's 35th Knessett – That the Parliament notes the swearing in of Israel's 35th Knessett on 17 May 2020, allowing the resumption of governance after 508 days of negotiations and political impasse; notes the agreement to form a government of national unity; understands that the position of Prime Minister will rotate, with incumbent Benjamin Netanyahu initially holding the office for the first 18 months before handing over to deputy Prime Minister Benny Grantz thereafter; notes comments by Gantz, who wishes for an era of reconciliation in Israel and that all Israeli citizens, Jewish or Arab, heterosexual or LGBT, would feel at home in Israel; believes that a productive and positive relationship continues to exist between the people of Israel and Scotland irrespective, and commits to maintaining constructive, open and positive dialogue with Israel on a wide range of areas of common interest.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-21818>

British Embassy Tel Aviv

Call for concept notes for the British Embassy Tel Aviv "COVID-19 Enabling Fund"
The Embassy is looking to fund one or two projects within an overall budget of up to

350,000 ILS to enable the delivery of small-scale, one-off or exploratory activities in support of the following priority areas, solely in relation to COVID-19:

- Development of vaccine, new drugs and therapeutics
- Development of better and more effective testing
- Economic recovery and response
- Support to vulnerable or disadvantaged communities within Israel ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-concept-notes-for-the-british-embassy-tel-aviv-covid-19-enabling-fund>

United Nations

Israel's Threat of Partial West Bank Annexation Will Deal 'Devastating Blow' to Two-State Solution, Middle East Coordinator Warns Security Council as Palestinian Authority Reacts by Ending Security Cooperation, Oslo Accord Commitments, Council Members Call for Return to Peace Talks

Israel's stated intention to annex parts of the occupied West Bank will deal a devastating blow to the two-State solution and close the door to fresh negotiations with the Palestinians towards peace in the Middle East, the top United Nations official for the peace process said ...

... the ongoing threat of annexation would constitute "a most serious violation of international law" that would also deal a "devastating blow" to the idea of two States, one Israeli and one Palestinian, living side by side in peace and security on the basis of pre-1967 borders. ...

Turning to the immediate situation on the ground, he said that it remains dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with Palestinian and Israeli authorities — despite political tensions — still coordinating their efforts to limit the spread of the deadly virus, carefully reopen their economies and lift virus-related restrictions on movement.

Relatively successful prevention efforts have so far ensured that the limited capacity of the health system in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has not been overwhelmed, but the ability of the Palestinian health sector — particularly in Gaza — to deal with a potential surge in cases remains a major concern, he said. ...

The representative of the United States acknowledged that many Council members have objections to elements of the "Vision for Peace" blueprint unveiled in January by President Donald J. Trump. ... She added that the Council must encourage the Palestinians to view President Trump's realistic and implementable proposal as both a starting point and an opportunity to realize their aspirations. ...

The representative of the Russian Federation said that now more than ever international cooperation and action is needed to advance the peace process, which would be undermined by annexation. ...

France's representative said that the inauguration of the new Israeli Government brings the prospect of annexation closer. He reiterated that any annexation of any part of the West Bank, including settlements only, would violate international law and imperil the two-State solution ...

Germany's delegate ... called upon Israel and the Palestinian Authority to remain committed to the Oslo Accords and to the obligations contained in those texts.

The representative of the United Kingdom, also voicing deep concern about the prospects of annexation, said that his delegation appreciates the Palestinian Authority's proposals for renewed dialogue, but it is disappointed by President Abbas's decision to no longer abide by security agreements. ...

China's delegate urged the relevant party to stop any unilateral actions, and refrain from

escalating conflict and tension ... The Palestinian issue is testing human conscience and international justice and the Palestinian people's right to statehood is not something for trading. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14192.doc.htm>

The "Vision for Peace" blueprint referred to above can be read at

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

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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

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