



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Covid-19: Hate Crimes

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Kim Johnson (Labour): What steps [is the Minister] taking to help prevent hate crimes against (a) people and (b) places of worship while covid-19 lockdown measures are eased. [903008]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Home Office is committed to rooting out hate crime across our society, and we are in continued conversations and discussions with the police and partners across Government to ensure that these criminals face justice. The Government have a zero-tolerance approach to the vicious misinformation that seeks to blame any race or religion for the spread of all sorts of coronavirus rumours and misinformation. The deliberate spreading of false information in order to undermine our respect and tolerance for each other has been disgraceful, and obviously we are working across Government to stamp this out.

Olivia Blake: Last month in South Yorkshire there was a tripling in hate crime and, even more shockingly, a doubling in the amount directed at people of east or south Asian descent. Muslim communities have also been attacked and singled out over Ramadan and Eid. What engagement has the Home Secretary had with those communities at risk?

Priti Patel: First, the figures that the hon. Lady has cited are simply shocking, disgraceful and unacceptable. That speaks to a small minority of individuals and their lack of tolerance and respect for the communities she mentions. She specifically asks me about the engagement I have had, but of course across Government, and in the Home Office as well, we are engaging with different groups and different leaders of organisations at a ministerial level, but also at an individual level. I would say to her and all colleagues that we absolutely condemn the appalling racial discrimination and the hateful way in which misinformation has been spread, but also the way in which this has been targeted against specific communities.

Kim Johnson: As we are all aware, there has been a disproportionate number of deaths of black people as a result of the coronavirus, with a number of equality organisations raising concerns about closed online groups mobilising to incite hatred and violence against communities that are becoming covid-19 scapegoats. Stop Hate UK claims that the real number of hate crimes is likely to be much higher as incidents against people and places of worship are significantly under-reported. Can the Secretary of State confirm what specific plans have been put in place proactively to address the feared increase in hate crime?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Lady for her very important question and the points she has made. Any form of hate crime is of course completely unacceptable, and we expect the perpetrators of such crimes to be brought to justice. I suggest and ask that anybody who is a victim ensures that they engage with the police and has crimes reported. On the Government's response and work across Government, obviously the Home Office and MHCLG continue to work closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council, importantly to ensure that all police forces—we police by consent in this country—are providing assistance to communities and community organisations, and having the right kind of dialogue and support. But we are also encouraging that hate crimes—throughout this pandemic, there are no excuses for them—are reported. I and we, across police and across Government, continue to work with civil society partners. That is absolutely the right thing to do, and we will continue to do so.

Bambos Charalambous (Labour): As the Secretary of State has mentioned, there has been a sharp increase in online hate crime during the coronavirus lockdown. Organisations providing advice and support for victims are predicting a big surge in hate crime following the relaxation of lockdown measures, so what steps are the Government taking to introduce counter-messaging for religious, ethnic and LGBT+ groups that fear an escalation in hate attacks, and what additional funding will be given to the organisations responding to increased demand for advice and support?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and he is right to ask about the cross-Government work that we do, and the support that we give to organisations, in the Home Office, but also with MHCLG. It is clear, in particular, that we see a lot of this activity taking place online. We are absolutely making sure that we can tackle that. We have robust legislation in place to deal with cyber-attacks, internet trolls, harassment, and perpetrators of grossly offensive, menacing and obscene behaviour, and we will continue to do so. Of course, through other means, such as places of worship funds and other activities across Government, we will absolutely continue to make sure that such organisations are resourced in the right way and, importantly, that we continue such community engagement and dialogue.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-08/debates/1605F5CF-6AAB-4A8F-8945-AA768911153B/Covid-19HateCrimes>

House of Commons Written Answers

Food Supply: Coronavirus

Christian Wakeford (Conservative) [49138] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that food parcels being distributed among Jewish and Muslim communities during the covid-19 outbreak are culturally appropriate and in line with the dietary requirements of those communities.

Christopher Pincher: The offer has been developed at pace in response to the Covid emergency. The shielding cohort is diverse and we recognise some of the

boxes contain products that may not be permitted culturally or for faith reasons by some groups.

In the standardised box which is delivered to individuals there is a note which explains that, should the individual have any allergies, or any religious or cultural dietary requirements, and are not able to eat some of the food and feel that the remaining contents of the package are not enough supplies for one week, they should contact their local authority.

The packages include tinned meat and tinned tuna, but as the product is packaged there is no risk of individuals having to touch foodstuffs that are unsuitable.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-19/49138/>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Marriage: Coronavirus

Darren Henry (Conservative) [53651] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether legislative proposals are required to amend the law to enable weddings, including death-bed weddings, to take place during the covid-19 outbreak.

Civil Partnerships and Marriage: Coronavirus

Darren Henry (Conservative) [53652] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what plans the Government has to allow witnesses to marriages and civil partnerships to attend remotely as the covid-19 lockdown is eased.

Alex Chalk: We understand the frustration couples planning a wedding must be feeling, and as with all coronavirus restrictions we will look to ease them as soon as it is safe to do so.

Statute law provides that marriages must be solemnized, and civil partnerships formed, in certain types of location and in the presence of certain people, including witnesses. We continue to explore what potential changes to the requirements for marriage and civil partnership might assist couples – where restrictions remain in place or where infection control means that the requirements cannot be met – without undermining the safeguards in the system.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-02/53651/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-02/53652/>

The following four questions all received the same answer

Marriage

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [54102] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the timeframe is for allowing the restarting of small weddings.

Marriage: Coronavirus

Hilary Benn (Labour) [54003] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what his timeframe is for reviewing the restrictions imposed as a result of the covid-19 outbreak on weddings taking place; and if he will make a statement.

Darren Jones (Labour) [54224] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to Command Paper CP 239, The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy, when the Government plans to allow people to gather in slightly larger groups to facilitate small weddings.

Simon Jupp (Conservative) [54280] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans he has to enable outdoor, social distance compliant (a) wedding ceremonies and (b) receptions to take place in summer 2020.

Penny Mordaunt: [Our Plan To Rebuild](#), the Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy, is published on gov.uk and includes details on plans for weddings. We

understand the frustration couples planning a wedding must be feeling at this time. We are keeping these restrictions under review and will ease them as soon as it is safe to do so. We will continue to work closely with faith leaders and local government over the coming weeks to go through the practicalities of doing so. Marriages and civil partnerships under the special procedure for those who are seriously ill and not expected to recover, are taking place in some cases where it is safe to do so in line with PHE guidance.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-03/54102/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-03/54003/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-03/54224/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-03/54280/>

The Command Paper referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy>

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

Navendu Mishra (Labour) [53656] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the Listed Place of Worship Grant beyond March 2021.

Nigel Huddleston: The Government is fully committed to supporting listed places of worship and has committed to the present level of funding until March 2021. An extension to the scheme is on hold until the completion of the Spending Review, which has been delayed from July to later this year to ensure that HM Treasury and departments can remain focused on responding to the immediate public health and economic emergency.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-02/53656/>

Information about the Listed Place of Worship Grant, referred to above, can be read at

<http://www.lpwscheme.org.uk/>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Jim Shannon (DUP) (572) Freedom of religion or belief and the covid-19 pandemic – that this House expresses great concern about the increasing stigmatisation and persecution of religious or belief minorities in countries around the world in response to the covid-19 pandemic; condemns the spread of misinformation and hate speech by extremist groups who seek to blame minorities for that pandemic; notes with great concern reports of increasing anti-Semitism and rising hate crimes against those of Chinese descent globally; condemns Government crackdowns on minority rights under the pretence of combating the spread of the covid-19 virus; urges Governments around the world to respect human rights in their responses to the covid-19 crisis and to take necessary measures to protect minority groups; encourages the UK Government's Department for International Development to learn the lessons of the Ebola crisis by engaging faith leaders in its covid-19 pandemic response; and calls on all Governments to release those who are

imprisoned for their faith or beliefs because those people are so detained in violation of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and are extremely vulnerable during the covid-19 pandemic due to limited opportunities for social distancing and self-isolation in what are often overcrowded prisons.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57078/freedom-of-religion-or-belief-and-the-covid19-pandemic>

Scottish Government

Action against inequality

... A new expert group will work with the Scottish Government to provide a clearer picture of the impact on minority ethnic communities of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Following indications that minority ethnic communities may face higher risks from COVID-19, the group will consider evidence and data being gathered by the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland, National Records of Scotland and the NHS, and advise on policy actions to mitigate any disproportionate effects.

As part of its immediate response to the pandemic, the Scottish Government has provided more than £500,000 to organisations working specifically with minority ethnic communities across Scotland.

Equalities Minister Christina McKelvie said: “The Scottish Government is deeply concerned by reports that suggest people from ethnic minorities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 both in terms of health and wider social and economic impacts.

“Although the current analysis in Scotland appears to show that there is not a higher level of COVID-19 cases than would be expected, I understand that many people will be anxious about protecting themselves and their families. I want to reassure them that we are taking this issue extremely seriously.

“We are working to better understand the data on how the pandemic is impacting on our minority ethnic communities in Scotland so we can take the appropriate action and this new group will use their expertise to challenge, inform and shape future work.

“Equality and human rights issues such as this are at the heart of our policy response to the impacts of COVID-19, and in particular in our recovery and renewal work. This is part of our wider work to advance race equality, backed by over £2.6 million in the last year.”

Angela Leitch, Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland said: “Understanding whether minority ethnic communities are at greater risk from COVID-19 is a crucial part of our response to the virus, particularly in light of reports from other parts of the UK and across the world.

“Public Health Scotland is undertaking work to review the available evidence understand emerging patterns including comparisons between the situation in Scotland and other parts of the UK. We are also working with National Records of Scotland and the Scottish Government to analyse and report on the impact of COVID-19 by ethnicity. Working with other members of the expert group, our evidence and data will enable the development of an effective evidence-based response and ensure the health of all of Scotland’s communities is protected.” ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.scot/news/action-against-inequality/>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour) [52503] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what estimate her Department has made of the number of humanitarian personnel prevented by Israel from entering or exiting Gaza in 2019; what assessment she has made of the effect of such barriers on the effectiveness of humanitarian programmes inside Gaza.

Palestinians: Health Services

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Labour) [52504] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the effect of denials of permits to exit Gaza on the ability of Palestinian health workers to access training and professional development.

James Cleverly: The UK remains deeply concerned about the restrictions on movement and access that affect Gaza. The inability to enter or exit the strip impacts the delivery of vital humanitarian services and limits the professional development of health and humanitarian workers.

DFID is providing £1.3 million (2018-21) to support the UN's Access Coordination Unit (ACU), which works to ensure humanitarian access to Gaza for UN and NGO workers by intervening when travel permits issued by Israel are delayed. The ACU has been instrumental in facilitating access, with more than 3,200 humanitarian personnel receiving assistance between October 2019 and March 2020. We continue to monitor the situation and regularly raise our concerns with the Israeli government.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-01/52503/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-01/52504/>

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>

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Foreign Affairs

Department for International Development Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister for Human Rights chairs coronavirus roundtable with faith leaders

Leaders from the UK's major faith and belief groups and faith-based aid charities met

virtually today ... to discuss the global impact of coronavirus on communities, and how they can work effectively together in the fight against the virus. ...

... faith and belief leaders also talked about the importance of religious support services in tackling the pandemic, including those based in mosques, churches, temples, synagogues and other religious or non-religious organisations. It comes as the World Health Organization points to the important role religious and belief groups play in helping identify those most in need. ...

... Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon said: As the coronavirus pandemic continues to have an unprecedented impact on communities around the world, we know – more than ever – that we will only succeed in fighting it if we do so together.

That is why I am hugely grateful to our faith leaders and faith-based charities who are doing so much to tackle the virus' devastating spread, by providing support and advice for the most vulnerable. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-human-rights-chairs-coronavirus-roundtable-with-faith-leaders>

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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>

Second Reading, House of Commons

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-08/debates/09B51B40-1E0B-4513-877D-CF836DB67F75/DivorceDissolutionAndSeparationBill\(Lords\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-08/debates/09B51B40-1E0B-4513-877D-CF836DB67F75/DivorceDissolutionAndSeparationBill(Lords))

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>

Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-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