



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Office: Racial Discrimination

Catherine West (Labour) [53544] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle racism.

Kit Malthouse: Tackling racially motivated hate crime remains a priority for this Government. The Home Office are supporting a range of projects to tackle racism, including Show Racism the Red Card and the Anne Frank Trust, organisations who work with young people across the country to challenge prejudice and discrimination.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-02/53544/>

Churches: Marriage

Charles Walker (Conservative) [59190] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, when he plans to issue additional guidance to religious organisations on the opening of churches to conduct wedding ceremonies, and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall: To protect public safety, weddings are among the social and religious events that can't take place at this time. We understand the inconvenience and disappointment this will cause.

In Step 2 of our [Roadmap to Recovery strategy](#) we said that we would examine how to enable people to gather to facilitate small marriage ceremonies. Government continues to look at this issue in great detail to see what will be possible while minimising risk.

We understand the frustration couples waiting to marry must be feeling, and as with all COVID-19 restrictions, we will look to ease them as soon as it is safe to do so.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-12/59190/>

House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Religious Buildings: Coronavirus

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Conservative) [HL5228] To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to allow the reopening of churches in the UK following their closure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; and what, if any, health measures will be put in place to facilitate the reopening of places of worship.

Lord Storey (Liberal Democrat) [HL5244] To ask Her Majesty's Government when they plan to permit churches and other places of worship to reopen.

Lord Greenhalgh: On 11 May, the Government published the document "[Our Plan to Rebuild](#)", which outlined the steps it would be taking to ease the lockdown restrictions.

The Government continues to consider how to allow places of worship to reopen for additional uses in Step 3 of its roadmap, which is expected to be no earlier 4 July, subject to further scientific advice. As part of the steps to ease the restrictions, the Government launched a Places of Worship Taskforce to look at how they can reopen and operate safely. Meetings are being led by the Secretary of State for Communities, or the Faith Minister, and comprise of representatives from the country's major faiths. The Taskforce is working towards the safe reopening of places of worship as soon as possible. It also addresses the specific issues that places of worship will face as they prepare to reopen safely.

As of Saturday 13 June, places of worship are now permitted to open for individual prayer, in line with social distancing guidelines. We have published (attached) [guidance](#) to support places of worship to do this in a way that is safe and in line with social distancing. Communal prayers, worship or devotion will not be possible at this stage. The Government will continue to work with the Taskforce towards the full reopening of places of worship as soon as the scientific advice allows.

Places of worship play an important role in spiritual and mental health for many, and in bringing our communities together, which is why we want them to reopen them as soon as we can. However, no place of worship will be able to reopen for further activities before a final decision by the Government and the accompanying changes to the legal position in the published regulations. Even after we permit places of worship to reopen for further activities, some may choose to reopen in stages or at a slower pace depending on their local circumstances.

The current list of permitted activities that can take place within a place of worship can be found (attached) on gov.uk [here](#), and the associated regulations can be found [here](#). These documents will be updated as and when further changes come into effect.

[Our Plan to Rebuild](#)

[Guidance for the safe use of places of worship](#)

[Closing certain business and venues in England](#)

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-06-03/HL5228/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-06-03/HL5244/>

Scottish Government

Gradual introduction of Phase 2

Further changes to lockdown restrictions in Scotland have been announced today (Thursday, 18 June) by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

Those shielding are now able to go outdoors for exercise from today. From tomorrow ... those shielding can take part in non-contact outdoor activities and can meet one other household, in groups of no more than eight outdoors. ...

From tomorrow anyone living alone or only with children under 18 can form an 'extended household group' with one other household. ...

From Monday, 29 June some indoor workplaces can re-open ...

It remains government advice to wear a face covering in enclosed areas where physical distancing is difficult ...

Physical distancing guidance remains to stay two metres apart from people outside your household. ...

From Monday 22 June ... Places of worship open for individual prayer and contemplation ...

For full details see

<https://www.gov.scot/news/gradual-introduction-of-phase-2/>

Welsh Parliament

Tributes to Mohammad Asghar

The Llywydd: Today, we gather as a Senedd following the desperately sad news of the death of our friend Mohammad Asghar. His death came as a cruelly unexpected blow. ...

Paul Davies (Conservative): ... Oscar was, of course, the first elected representative of this institution from an ethnic and minority background, and he made sure to use that platform to widen every possible connection between the ethnic minority groups in Wales and this institution. He was the first Assembly Member to invite the Israeli ambassador to the Senedd to discuss peace, harmony and understanding between the Muslim and Jewish communities. ...

As a man of deep faith himself, he was full of respect and tolerance for those who worshipped, and so it was a natural fit for him to be our group's spokesperson on faith. It was a role that was very important to him, and he worked hard to engage with faith communities across Wales and to build inter-faith networks across the country. ...

Adam Price (Plaid Cymru): ... The Islamic faith, as we've heard, was essential to Oscar—a devout Muslim and the first to sit in our Senedd. He had strong links with the wider Muslim community, and he was never happier than when creating connections, building bridges, opening doors. ...

Angela Burns (Conservative): The sun was beating down on a group of us who had gone to visit Israel and Palestine, and we were standing on the roof of the Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem, and I was chatting to Oscar and he waved his arms around, as he often did, and he said, 'Look, Angie—there is Temple Mount and Al-Aqsa Mosque, and over there the Holy Sepulchre, and there's the Western Wall and the Mount of Olives. We are all here. We can live together.' ... By the time we finished our trip, it was Oscar who knew the names of the drivers and the bellhops, where they lived and their family stories. Whether he was talking to an ambassador or a street seller, he was interested in them, and they knew it, they sensed it. Because Oscar always sought to bring people together. He was passionate about bridging the gaps between Pakistan and India, about bringing Muslims and Christians and Jews together, about uniting people with faith and people with no faith. He was funny and warm, hugely politically incorrect at times, and he loved his country and

his countries. He was incredibly proud to be Welsh and British, to be a Muslim, a husband and a father. He had belief and charisma. He could be excitable and voluble, but also considered and, above all, immensely, immensely kind. He was a laughing, smiley, proud and devout man; a buyer, as Nick has already said, of endless cups of tea for all; a fount of ideas, from the great to the truly terrible; and an arch-negotiator. ...

In this world of ours, you must ask yourself: are you going to curse the darkness or light a candle? And Oscar lit candles everywhere he went. ...

Darren Millar (Conservative): ... some of my fondest memories of Oscar were during the Welsh Conservatives' visit to the Holy Land. There was no greater supporter of Israel and an advocate of peace in the middle east than Oscar. While we were both from different faith traditions, Oscar and I prayed together for the peace of Jerusalem at the Western Wall and we also prayed for one another's families as we sat, arm in arm and with tears in our eyes, in St Peter's Church, set amongst the ruins of the biblical town of Capernaum, on the shores of Lake Galilee.

During that trip, we also visited the modern Palestinian town of Rawabi, the brainchild of the famous Palestinian entrepreneur Bashar Masri. The group had arranged to meet Bashar in a posh cafe, and the meeting was chaired by Oscar. He did an excellent job, it all went incredibly well, and after the meeting, we all strolled back to the minibus, which was waiting to whisk us on to our next appointment. But, just as we were about to leave, we noticed that someone was missing. And after a roll call, we realised that it was, as is often the case, Mark Isherwood. Oscar looked at me with a hint of concern on his face, 'Where is he?', he asked. I responded, 'He's probably explaining the intricacies of the Barnett formula and the fiscal framework for Wales to the Arabic waiter, Oscar.' At which, Oscar fell about in uncontrollable laughter to the extent that he looked like a laughing policeman on the promenade in a Welsh seaside resort. ...

Suzy Davies (Conservative): ... He found other people's faiths, as we've heard from others today, completely fascinating, and his determination to bring people of different beliefs and different practices together was a genuine and proper passion. ... And it was so clear how important his own faith was to him, and, as I learned more about what matters in Muslim life, I learned more about Oscar ...

Mark Isherwood (Conservative): ... As a devout Muslim, Oscar was a man of tolerance, compassion, inclusion. An example to people of all faiths and all beliefs ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/6373#A58645>

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Holocaust

Scottish Parliament Motion

S5M-22073 Keith Brown (SNP): Alva Academy, A Vision School for Holocaust Education – That the Parliament commends Alva Academy on being awarded the status of a Vision School for Holocaust Education; congratulates both students and teachers on this prestigious award, which is a testament to the phenomenal work undertaken at the academy; understands that this award is in partnership with the University of West of Scotland; recognises that Holocaust education comprises learning about and from the Holocaust, contributing to anti-racist education and education for citizenship, supporting religious equality and explores the wider contemporary relevance of the Holocaust; believes that anti-racist education should be actively promoted in all schools across Scotland; notes that the Vision Schools project aims to promote excellence in Holocaust

teaching by rewarding innovation, encouraging sharing of good practice and is part of a whole-establishment approach to promoting equality and inclusion and challenging discrimination and prejudice, and strongly believes that anti-Semitism and racism have no place in Scotland.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-22073>

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Israel

See also the Welsh Parliament “Tributes to Mohammad Asghar” in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [57197] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of changes in the level of (a) attacks by settlers and (b) demolitions of Palestinian structures in the occupied Palestinian territory since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic.

James Cleverly: As we made clear at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 20 May, the UK is concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property by Israeli authorities, and repeated incidents of settler violence at this time. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and weakens the capacity of Palestinians to withstand the impact of COVID-19. We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We welcome the efforts of Israeli authorities to address settler violence, and urge them to thoroughly investigate every instance to bring those responsible to justice and end the culture of impunity. During this fragile period, we call on both parties to avoid any provocative action which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical. We have also stressed the importance of the Israel security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-09/57197/>

The UK speech to the UN Security Council referred to above can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/securing-a-peaceful-future-for-israelis-and-palestinians>

Israeli Settlements

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) [57342] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment her Department has made of the potential effect of Israel's intended annexation of parts of the West Bank on Palestinian (a) livelihoods, (b) housing, and (c) freedom of movement.

James Cleverly: As we made clear at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 20 May, we are deeply concerned by reports that the new Israeli Government coalition has reached an agreement which may pave the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The UK position is clear: any unilateral moves toward annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would

be damaging to renewed efforts to restart peace negotiations, and contrary to international law.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-09/57342/>

The UK speech to the UN Security Council referred to above can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/securing-a-peaceful-future-for-israelis-and-palestinians>

Gaza: Demonstrations

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [57198] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of progress made by Israel in (a) investigating, and (b) holding those liable accountable for potentially unlawful killings by its forces in the context of the 2018-2019 Gaza protests.

James Cleverly: The UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defense Forces police non-violent protests and the border areas, including use of live ammunition. We will continue to do so. We fully support an independent and transparent investigation into the deadly events in Gaza. We welcome that the Israeli Military Advocate General has ordered five criminal investigations which relate to eleven separate instances of Palestinian fatalities during the Gaza border protests. These investigations are ongoing. Given the importance of accountability, it is vital these investigations are independent and transparent; that their findings are made public; and, if wrongdoing is found, that those responsible be held to account.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-09/57198/>

Palestinians: Textbooks

Peter Gibson (Conservative) [58077] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment she has made of the implications for her Department's transparency commitments of reports that the EU plans to classify the interim report into Palestinian textbooks jointly commissioned by the UK.

James Cleverly: Following the UK's calls for international action, an independent review of Palestinian textbooks is currently underway, conducted by the Georg Eckert Institute, a specialist textbook analysis centre.

DFID continues to favour transparency and the UK has repeatedly lobbied the EU to push for publication of the interim report.

To ensure the review could begin immediately on the signing of the contract, the UK commissioned the Georg Eckert Institute to produce a separate inception report to establish its methodology in advance. We plan to publish this report in the coming weeks.

We will continue to raise our concerns about allegations of incitement with the Palestinian Authority (PA) as I did most recently with the PA Minister for Education on 4 June.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-10/58077/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israeli Settlements

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL5309] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel following the statement

made by that government's Defence Minister on 1 June, that he had ordered Israel's military to prepare for the annexation of parts of the West Bank in accordance with the peace plan announced by the President of the United States on 28 January.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Foreign Secretary made clear our concerns about reports that the new Israeli Government coalition has reached an agreement which may pave the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank during a call with the Israeli Foreign Minister on 2 June. We also made clear our concerns at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 20 May. 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. The UK is committed to making progress towards a two-state solution. We will continue to press Israel and the Palestinians strongly on the need to refrain from taking actions which make peace more difficult.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-06-04/HL5309/>

The peace plan referred to above can be read at

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

The UK speech to the UN Security Council referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/securing-a-peaceful-future-for-israelis-and-palestinians>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Iran: Arms Trade

Andrew Bowie (Conservative) [57310] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what mechanisms are in place to prevent the UN conventional arms embargo on Iran from expiring in October 2020.

James Cleverly: The UK remains committed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA), a reciprocal deal that lifts sanctions in exchange for tough nuclear limits. Iran has broken the nuclear limits in the JCPoA and we are working to bring Iran back into compliance through the deal's Dispute Resolution Mechanism. UNSCR 2231, which underpins the JCPoA, includes a number of clauses designed to allow sanctions to expire on fixed dates: the UN conventional arms embargo is due to expire in October 2020. We are consulting partners on the implications of the expiry of the UN arms embargo for Iran and wider regional security. We note that other sanctions regimes will remain in force, such as UNSCRs 1540, 1701, and 2216 which prohibit the proliferation of weapons to Lebanese Hizballah and the Houthis. The UK encourages all states to implement national export control best practice in support of these regimes. The EU arms embargo and UN ballistic missile restrictions on Iran will also remain in place until 2023.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-06-09/57310/>

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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>

Committee Stage, House of Commons

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-17/debates/45EE5F3F-8AE6-413D-AF68-EDA8484726CD/DivorceDissolutionAndSeparationBill\(Lords\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-17/debates/45EE5F3F-8AE6-413D-AF68-EDA8484726CD/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>

Proposed amendments for Stage 3

<https://beta.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/current-bills/civil-partnership-scotland-bill/stage-3/marshalled-list-of-amendments-at-stage-3-civil-partnership-scotland-bill.pdf>

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

**** closes in 10 days**

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