



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Churches: Coronavirus

Robert Halfon (Conservative) [72873] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will publish the timeframe for people to be able to sing in churches as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased.

Luke Hall: The Government recognises that singing is a key part of our cultural and religious life. We have published Guidance for the Safe Use of Places of Worship during COVID-19 which provides advice on singing within places of worship:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has also published guidance for people who work in performing arts, including organisations, venue operators and participants:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

Singing is a central element of many religious practices but poses a particular risk of spreading the virus. The Government and medical and scientific communities are urgently engaged in research around transmission risk and how activities such as singing and chanting can be managed safely indoors, by congregations and by amateurs.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-13/72873/>

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House of Commons Oral Answer

Business of the House

Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrat): Further to the comments of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, may I say to the Leader of the House that it is deeply regrettable that we will, even for the first week back, not have had an opportunity in this Chamber to discuss the proposals by Israel to annex the Occupied Palestinian Territories? It is a matter on which this House should express a view, as we have historic obligations in the region. I gently say to him that perhaps it might have taken precedence, in terms of the time available in the Chamber, over the rating arrangements for public lavatories, which could be dealt with in Committee—for everyone's convenience?

Jacob Rees-Mogg: On the issue of Israel, the Government remain committed to a two-state solution. Any moves towards annexation would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and contrary to international law. We have conveyed our opposition to Prime Minister Netanyahu on multiple occasions, and reiterated this message in a statement to the UN Security Council on 24 June. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-07-16/debates/60D15FF9-4D3D-429A-B97A-8074FA728424/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-9D62F786-37D1-4C70-A4D7-758A492215F9>

The UK statement to the Security Council, referred to above, can be read at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/urging-a-negotiated-two-state-solution-between-israelis-and-palestinians>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians illegal and an affront to justice: UN expert

A UN human rights expert has called on Israel to immediately stop all actions amounting to collective punishment of the Palestinian people, with millions of innocent harmed daily and nothing achieved but deeper tensions and an atmosphere conducive to further violence.

"It is an affront to justice and the rule of law to see that such methods continue to be used in the 21st century and that Palestinians collectively continue to be punished for the actions of a few," said Michael Lynk, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967. "These practices entail serious violations against Palestinians including the right to life, freedom of movement, health, adequate shelter and adequate standard of living."

In his report to the 44th session of the Human Rights Council, Lynk said Israel's strategy to control the Palestinian population violates a foundational rule of virtually every modern legal system: Only the guilty can be punished for their acts, and only after a fair process. The innocent can never be made to be punished for the deeds of others.

"The extent of the devastating impact of Israel's collective punishment policy can be most strikingly seen in its ongoing 13-year-old closure of Gaza, which now suffers from a completely collapsed economy, devastated infrastructure and a barely functioning social service system," ...

"While Israel's justification for imposing the closure on Gaza was to contain Hamas and ensure Israel's security, the actual impact of the closure has been the destruction of Gaza's economy, causing immeasurable suffering to its two million inhabitants," the Rapporteur said. "Collective punishment has been clearly forbidden under international humanitarian law through Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. No exceptions are permitted." ...

Lynk said it was disheartening that the demolition of Palestinian homes is still viewed by the Israeli political and legal leadership, including the Israeli High Court, as a permissible deterrent. "In fact, these demolitions only further contribute to an atmosphere of hate and vengeance, as the Israeli security leadership has itself acknowledged."

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26111&LangID=E>

The report referred to above can be read at

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session44/Documents/A_HRC_44_60.pdf

Human Rights Council hears oral update on Georgia and holds interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on occupied Palestinian territories

... State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, expressed appreciation for the work of the Special Rapporteur. Israel's prolonged colonial exploitation was the direct cause of the suffering of the Palestinian people. The vision of peace and prosperity put forward by the United States administration denied the rights of the Palestinian people. This vision gave the green light to the Israeli Government to signal its decision to occupy more Palestinian territories. Collective punishment amounted to war crimes according to the Rome Statutes, and the blockade of Gaza was one of the worst forms of collective punishment. The COVID-19 pandemic had only further intensified the suffering and violations conducted under collective punishment, as the State of Palestine called for an end of the occupation.

Speakers said collective punishment was a flagrant violation of human rights, and Israel's refusal to cooperate with the mandate should not be allowed to continue. ... Everyday, the occupying forces adopted provocative measures amounting to collective punishment and reflected the racist mentality of the occupier, which was attempting to destroy the Palestinian people. ...

S. Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, stated that there were many measures that States could take to influence Israel ... exerting diplomatic pressure, intervening directly with commanders, referring a situation to the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, requesting a meeting of the high contracting parties, and non-renewal of trade privileges, among others. Countermeasures could also include arms embargos, financial restrictions, flight bans, and the reduction or suspension of aid and cooperation agreements. ...

The annexation plans of illegal settlements in the West Bank were condemned by many speakers, who emphasised its illegality under international law. The publication of the list of businesses associated with illegal Israeli settlements was welcomed by speakers. Continued displacement of Palestinians, the inhumane blockade of Gaza, and systematic violations of Palestinian rights made up an unsustainable and unacceptable reality. Other speakers noted that an entire agenda item was dedicated to Israel, the only country to which such a situation applied, pointing out that Israel had provided Palestinian territories during the COVID-19 pandemic with training and testing kits.

S. Michael Lynk ... said that as of last week, there were 5,500 reported cases of COVID-19 in the occupied Palestinian territories and 72 in Gaza, and reminded that Israel remained primarily responsible for the right to health, as the occupying power. ... As long as Israel continued to occupy Palestine and as long as the Palestinian people were denied the right to self-determination, this had to be a foremost concern for the world. In the resolutions pointed out by speakers who were against Israel being singled out by the Council, it was not Israel that was being singled out for its existence as a State, it was Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territory and its refusal to give Palestinians self-determination that was being singled out. There was deliberate confusion of those

two points entertained by those who were unfriendly to efforts by the international community to end the occupation. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26105&LangID=E>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Iran: Arms Trade

Gareth Bacon (Conservative) [71913] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what mechanisms are in place to prevent Iran from increasing arms exports to terrorist groups after the expiration of the UN conventional arms embargo in October 2020.

James Cleverly: We have repeatedly set out concerns about Iranian destabilising behaviour in the region, including proliferation to non-state actors. As set out in the E3 Foreign Ministers statement of 19 June, we are working with partners, including UN Security Council Members, to address the planned expiry of the UN conventional arms embargo.

It is also important to note that other UN sanctions (UNSCRs 1540, 2216 and 1701), which prohibit the proliferation of weapons to the Houthis and Lebanese Hizballah, will remain in place after the arms embargo expires. The EU arms embargo and UN ballistic missile restrictions on Iran will also remain in place until 2023. The UK encourages all states to implement national export control best practice in support of these regimes.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-09/71913/>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/e3-foreign-ministers-statement-on-the-jcpoa-19-june>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/assisteddying.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

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 8 days**

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