



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Places of Worship: Covid-19

Afzal Khan (Labour): What steps his Department has taken to help places of worship open safely during the covid-19 outbreak. [907012]

John Spellar (Labour): What steps his Department has taken to help places of worship open safely during the covid-19 outbreak. [907018]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): As Communities Secretary, ensuring places of worship can reopen and remain open has been a priority for me and my Department. Their contribution to our country as places of solace, as well as for significant moments such as weddings and funerals, is clear to us all. Places of worship remain open today for more than six people for communal prayer and services with existing covid-secure requirements continuing to apply.

Afzal Khan: During this pandemic we have seen a sharp spike in Islamophobia, from blaming Muslims for the spread of covid-19 to fuelling online hate. I am sure the Secretary of State will want to join me in commending the community for its patience and hard work in these difficult months. Given that the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies has previously highlighted the good work of the Muslim Council of Britain in reaching minority groups that the Government are unable or unwilling to reach, can he outline what discussions he has had with the MCB and other Muslim organisations on the safe reopening of mosques?

Robert Jenrick: Like the hon. Gentleman, I want to praise and thank the Muslim communities throughout the country for their forbearance. We have worked closely with them through our places of worship taskforce that the Prime Minister and I set up. I have had the privilege to meet representatives from mosques, including the London Central Mosque on the eve of the Eid celebrations, to thank them once again for their forbearance. We have put in place detailed guidelines to help mosques to reopen safely and will continue to work with Muslim groups in the weeks and months ahead.

John Spellar: It is clear from what the Secretary of State has said that he recognises that

in these troubled times places of worship are more important than ever in providing for the spiritual and material needs of their congregations and in combating loneliness and mental health problems. However, they face their own challenges in making their premises safe for their worshippers and meeting the costs of that as well as for their own people. What help is the Department giving directly to places of worship to facilitate that provision, and is it engaging with them regularly to ensure that this can be effectively implemented?

Robert Jenrick: The right hon. Gentleman makes a series of very important points. At the start of the pandemic, I recognised that places of worship needed to be prioritised. They should not be relegated behind other activities, whether shops, casinos or other important things that we want to keep open to protect people's livelihoods. Places of worship matter for those with faith, and we needed to ensure that they could reopen. I worked extremely closely with faith leaders through our places of worship taskforce. That work continues, and we have very good relationships with all the major faiths. The guidelines are in place and are now extremely detailed. They cover not only basic guidelines for all faiths, but very detailed guidelines for individual practices for particular religions. We saw that prominently recently, for example, with the Jewish holidays, when we worked out detailed guidelines for Yom Kippur. We will continue to work closely with faith leaders in the weeks and months ahead.

Janet Daby (Labour): Since reopening, mosques have incurred the cost of PPE, which is an additional financial cost to them, along with deep cleaning several times a day after members and visitors visit. The Muslim Council of Britain estimates that it has already given out £500,000 in small grants, but there are far more mosques in need than those funds can reach. What action is the Secretary of State taking to financially support places of worship to reopen in a covid-secure way?

Robert Jenrick: Alongside other charities, places of worship are able to apply to the £200 million coronavirus community support fund, which has helped organisations providing essential services for vulnerable people affected by the current crisis.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-10-05/debates/2BB0334D-454D-449F-AC4F-0CC11AD2D50F/PlacesOfWorshipCovid-19>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Apsana Begum (Labour) (964) Anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street – That this House marks the 84th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street on 4 October when in 1936, Oswald Mosley and members of the British Union of Fascists were blocked from marching through East London by the Jewish community, trade unionists, socialists and others; recognises the continuing importance of the Battle of Cable Street in inspiring communities uniting together in solidarity in the fight against the far right; pays tribute to the rich cultural and political history of the Jewish community in East London; and reaffirms its commitment to the fight against racism, fascism and antisemitism.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57519/anniversary-of-the-battle-of-cable-street>

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Holocaust

House of Commons Oral Answer

Topical Questions: Communities, Housing and Local Government

Antony Higginbotham (Conservative): This year marks 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. It vital that we remember what happened so that we can learn the lessons of the past, so will my right hon. Friend reassure me and the House that the Government remain committed to delivering a national holocaust memorial?

Robert Jenrick: I am delighted that the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), has expressed his support for the national holocaust memorial. I hope that now is the moment for Members from all parties in this House and, indeed, in the other place to unite behind the proposal and ensure that the memorial is built as soon as possible.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-10-05/debates/FAE8EDA1-0291-4FE7-A0B0-610AE808885E/TopicalQuestions#contribution-7C303C5E-7EB5-4C3B-8D88-FD518A69F7B3>

Holocaust Memorial Inquiry

The Holocaust Memorial Public Inquiry opens today, Tuesday 6 October 2020. Details of the inquiry procedure, and of how to participate in and observe the inquiry are available from

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/holocaust-memorial-inquiry-documents#public-inquiry-and-application-details>

Documents relating to the inquiry are available from

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/holocaust-memorial-inquiry-documents#inquiry-documents>

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Schools

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8560] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 24 September (HL8095), what support they plan to give to the Palestinian Authority to enable the continued provision of education for Palestinian children whose school buildings have been demolished by the Israel Defence Force in Area C of the West Bank.

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL8563] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the arrangements put in place for the education of Palestinian children whose schools have been demolished by the government of Israel in the last five years.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: In all but the most exceptional of circumstances demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice of demolitions (and confiscations) causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and is harmful to the peace process. The UK does not undertake a specific assessment of the impact of demolitions on the education of Palestinian

children, but the UK does support education in the OPTs.

UK Aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) helps to ensure it can deliver essential services, including the provision of education by contributing to the salaries of carefully vetted teachers and education workers in the West Bank.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-28/hl8560>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-28/hl8563>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-14/hl8095>

The following two questions both received the same answer

West Bank: Demolition

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat) [HL8467] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about reports that 160 structures were demolished in the West Bank in July and August.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat) [HL8468] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that the government of Israel is demolishing water, sanitation and hygiene structures used by Palestinians in the West Bank.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property and structures by Israeli authorities. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians and is harmful to the peace process. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv have repeatedly raised our concerns about demolitions with Israeli Ministers and senior officials, and urged them to cease the counter-productive policy of demolitions. We call on Israel to provide a clear, transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-24/hl8467>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-24/hl8468>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2592>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2621>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2608>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2584>

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

Getting Married: A Consultation Paper on Weddings Law (closing date 3 December 2020)

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/weddings/#weddings-consultation-paper>

Hate crime laws (closing date 24 December 2020)

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/hate-crime/>

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