



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answers

Covid-19 Update

col 48 Imran Hussain (Labour): Many of my constituents from all faiths have raised serious concerns about the restrictions that will effectively close religious institutions at a time when people need more than ever the comfort and security that their faith provides, putting a heavy burden on people's mental health. Places of worship have gone to great lengths to put covid-secure measures in place and have demonstrated that congregational prayers can safely happen, with Bradford Council for Mosques in particular leading on that work. I urge the Prime Minister to look again at places of worship and more measured policies. Given that they have had no financial support since the beginning of the pandemic, will he ensure that they get the financial support they need?

The Prime Minister: I really appreciate what mosques around the country have done to make themselves covid secure, and what has been done in Bradford and elsewhere. I know how frustrating it is for places of worship that we have had to take these steps. All I can say is that we need to take them together as a country to get the R down and to get the virus down. ...

Saqib Bhatti (Conservative): ... I know that [the Prime Minister] is committed to ending these new measures by 2 December. Many of my constituents are worried about what will happen afterwards, so can he commit to doing everything he can to ensure that we will have some sort of normal Christmas and at least have measures in place so that households will be able to mix by 25 December?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and I am conscious that we have Diwali, Hanukkah and many religious celebrations coming up in December. I do want people to have as normal a Christmas as possible, and that is why I think it is very important that the whole country comes together to follow these measures. I am sure that if we do, we can get the R down in the way that I have described, and people will have as normal a Christmas as possible. ...

col 50 Rupa Huq (Labour): I have heard what the Prime Minister said about congregational worship for faith groups, and it strikes me sitting here that the measures taken at Ealing abbey—four to a pew with every other pew roped off, hand sanitiser and a one-way system—are exactly what we have in this place. Does this not therefore seem contradictory? ...

col 59 **Edward Leigh (Conservative):** ... will [the Prime Minister] join me at daily mass in Westminster cathedral tomorrow? Would he like to witness the extreme social distancing, the constant cleansing after services and the mask wearing—all factors taken far more seriously there than almost anywhere else? Would he like to respond to Cardinal Vincent Nichols and give him the evidence as to why there is any possibility, after all these measures, of religious services spreading covid? Could the Prime Minister offer some hope to the faith communities? Could he perhaps reply to the letter I have sent to him, where we suggest further compromises, for instance, whereby we would have to apply by email before we attended services? Can he offer us any hope at all?

The Prime Minister: Of course I can. I thank my right hon. Friend for what he has just said and I am so sorry that the faith communities temporarily must go through this difficult period of not being able to observe services in the way that they want and I would like. This is only for 28 days and the hope I can offer—the candle in the darkness—is that we will, if we get this right, be able to go back to something much more like normal life before Christmas and people will be able to celebrate Christmas, in churches and elsewhere across this country. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-11-02/debates/6AF57346-80F3-491D-AA67-9EF31B9B3B26/Covid-19Update>

House of Commons Written Answers

Sex and Relationship Education: Religion

Stella Creasy (Labour Co-op) [108223] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether materials from religious organisations are permitted in schools under the Plan your relationships, sex and health curriculum guidance published by his Department on 24 September 2020.

Nick Gibb: The Department is committed to supporting all schools to deliver the content of the new subjects of Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE). When teaching the new RSHE subjects, schools should take into account the age of pupils and their religious background.

Our support package, published on 24 September, is aimed at helping all schools increase their confidence and quality of their teaching practice. This package includes teacher training modules, non-statutory implementation guidance and training led by Teaching Schools.

The Department has made clear that it is important that schools take full responsibility for ensuring lessons and materials they intend to use are age appropriate, suitable and politically impartial, particularly when using materials produced by external organisations. We are aware that there are many resources in circulation to support schools to deliver these subjects.

The Department's 'Plan your relationships, sex and health curriculum' implementation guidance includes advice on working with external agencies. It builds on the content of the statutory RSHE guidance and it includes clear advice on choosing resources. It states that schools should assess each resource that they propose to use to ensure it is appropriate for the age and maturity of their pupils and sensitive to their needs, where relevant. This guidance is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-your-relationships-sex-and-health-curriculum>.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-23/108223>

Religious Hatred: Islam

Afzal Khan (Labour) [107102] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities

and Local Government, what steps he has taken to tackle Islamophobia; and what plans he has to support Islamophobia Awareness Month in November 2020.

Luke Hall: This Government has pledged to tackle prejudice, racism and discrimination. We recognise the discrimination and intolerance faced by Muslim communities. Everyone in our country should be able to practice their faith in freedom. We already have some of the strongest legislation in the world to tackle hate crime and, where groups incite racial hatred or are engaged in racially or religiously motivated criminal activity, we would expect them to be prosecuted. This Government's work to tackle the scourge of anti-Muslim hatred is extensive, and includes:

- Supporting Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) with more than £2.8 million since 2016, helping to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred
- Providing almost £5 million through our Places of Worship Security Grant in the last two years alone - helping to secure and protect mosques and other places of worship
- Supporting the work of the cross-Government Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, which provides valuable advice on the challenges faced by Britain's Muslim communities, and proposals on how to address them.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-21/107102>

Information about the Places of Worship protective security funding scheme, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

Religious Hatred: Islam

Afzal Khan (Labour) [107103] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to her Department's statistical release, Hate Crime: 2019-20, published on 13 October 2020, what steps her Department is taking to tackle (a) Islamophobia and (b) the number of Islamophobic incidents.

James Brokenshire: This Government recognises the discrimination and intolerance faced by Muslim communities and the UK has a robust legislative framework in place to respond to hate crime.

The Government has taken steps to combat anti-Muslim Hatred including supporting Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) with just over £2.8m between 2016 and 2020 to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred.

In addition, the Places of Worship protective security funding scheme, which provides security measures for mosques and other places of worship, has been allocated £3.2m for 2020-21 - double what was awarded last year.

This Government is committed to continuing the promotion of shared values among people of all backgrounds through sustainable social integration and meaningful civic participation whilst tackling and preventing religiously and racially discriminatory behaviour and those acting against others because of their faith or race. Therefore, we have launched a competitive grant scheme for 2020-21 to support projects in this space, with a budget of up to £2M.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-21/107103>

The statistical release referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2019-to-2020>

Information about the Places of Worship protective security funding scheme, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

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House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Human Rights

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [107649] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential effect of Israel's refusal to grant visas for officials of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the monitoring of human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [107650] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to his Israeli counterpart on Israel's refusal to grant visas for officials of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights wishing to enter the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

James Cleverly: We are aware of the difficulties officials of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have faced in renewal of the visas necessary to remain in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The UK, alongside international partners, raised our concern with the Government of Israel on 26 October. The UK also raised this issue with the Mission of Israel to the UN in Geneva on 8 September. We call upon the Government of Israel to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and organisations and to allow them to freely operate in Israel and the OPTs. We continue to make clear that a strong, vibrant civil society is in Israel's own interest. As a friend of Israel, we would be concerned by any developments that may undermine this commitment.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-22/107649>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-22/107650>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL9334] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about reports that the Israel Defence Forces have raided Palestinian villages at night for training purposes.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not raised these specific reports with the Israeli authorities. While we recognise Israel's legitimate need to deploy security measures, we encourage them to deploy these in a way which minimises tension.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-19/hl9334>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL9335] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that a Palestinian in a village near Nablus was blinded by a rubber bullet fired by an Israel Defence Force soldier.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Whilst we have not made representations on this specific incident, we continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, and urge restraint in the use of live fire. In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we have advocated swift, transparent investigations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-19/hl9335>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN expert calls for accountability as Israel records highest rate of illegal settlement approvals

The Israeli government's recent announcement that it has approved construction of nearly 5,000 more settlement homes in the occupied Palestinian territory is a grave breach of international law, an independent human rights expert said today.

"The international community must answer this grave breach of international law with more than mere criticism," said Michael Lynk, UN special rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967. ...

"As the Israeli settlements continue to devour the land that is meant for the independent Palestinian state, the international community observes, it sometimes objects, but it does not act," said Lynk. "It is high time for accountability." ...

"While Israel may have shelved its plans for the de jure annexation of the settlements in August, it is continuing with its de facto annexation of the Palestinian territory through this unrelenting settlement growth," Lynk said. "Both de facto and de jure annexation of occupied territory are clear violations of the Charter of the United Nations and the 1998 Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court. This acceleration of settlement growth worsens an already precarious human rights situation on the ground." ...

Lynk also expressed deep concern that the United States amended its existing scientific agreements with Israel on 27 October to allow joint funding for projects in the illegal Israeli settlements. ...

"These changes to the bilateral agreements between the United States and Israel fly in the face of Resolution 2334, which calls upon all member states to recognize the illegality of the settlements, and to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967," he said.

"The international rule of law matters and, if we are to avoid the rule of the jungle, it must be obeyed. ...

At the same time that approvals of new settlement homes are accelerating, Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes and properties is also increasing, Lynk said....

The demolitions also violate international humanitarian law and contribute to the coercive atmosphere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26452&LangID=E>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2622>

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

Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-bill>

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

Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Specified Type B Procedures) (Scotland) Regulations (closing date 20 November 2020)

<https://consult.gov.scot/population-health/consultation-specified-type-b-procedures/>

Ethnic disparities and inequality in the UK (closing date 30 November 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ethnic-disparities-and-inequality-in-the-uk-call-for-evidence/ethnic-disparities-and-inequality-in-the-uk-call-for-evidence>

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