



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Equality Act 2010

**Liz Saville Roberts (Plaid Cymru)** [104141] To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Equality Act 2010 in preventing discrimination (a) on the ground of religion or belief or (b) because of a lack of a religion or belief.

**Kemi Badenoch:** The provisions within the Equality Act 2010 protect everyone equally, if they hold a recognised religion or belief or if they have a lack of any such religion or belief. The Act does not list or codify recognised religions or beliefs as this is a matter for the courts. Exceptions in the Act recognise the legitimate requirements of organised religions, such as allowing religions to require that its ministers hold that particular faith. We believe this is an effective legislative approach.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-15/104141>

### House of Lords Oral Answers

#### Covid-19: Places of Worship

**Lord Moylan (Conservative):** To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the official guidance to address the Covid-19 pandemic issued following the Prime Minister's remarks on Saturday 31 October, whether they will now produce the evidence that justifies the cessation of acts of public worship in places of worship.

**The Minister of State, Home Office and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Lord Greenhalgh):** My Lords, we have come to a critical point in the fight against Covid-19. The R rate is above one across England, and the ONS estimates that an average of one in 100 people has the virus. To protect the NHS and get the R rate below one, we must limit our interaction with others. Therefore, with great regret, while places of worship will remain open for individual prayer, communal worship cannot take place at this time.

**Lord Moylan:** ... This Question is about evidence. Evidence matters to science. Clearly,

my noble friend the Minister is not going to announce a reversal of government policy, but can he at least give an assurance to your Lordships' House that if these measures are continued beyond 2 December or are reimposed in the future either nationally or locally, despite the many efforts to make places of worship Covid secure, that will not happen without the Government offering some evidence for these restrictions on acts of public worship being renewed or extended?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** ... Public Health England is looking at the evidence around places of worship and proliferation of the virus. I am aware that a tremendous amount of effort has been put into ensuring that places of worship are Covid secure.

**Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Labour):** My Lords, I am glad to hear the Minister's recognition that churches have acted diligently in making sure that things are safe. Over the last 10 weeks, I have either led or attended acts of worship in three different churches, and meticulous attention has been given to all aspects of proper behaviour in such circumstances. Methodists are even reduced to not singing our hymns: we are reduced to humming behind our masks or, indeed, some kind of Trappist silence. On behalf of the many elderly people for whom the act of worship is the only social activity they have from one week to another, when can their needs be taken seriously into account so that they can enjoy a sense of well-being, even in these difficult times?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, we recognise that this lockdown will be a very difficult period for people of faith too. The position is somewhat better than in the first lockdown, when places of worship were shut entirely. I note what the noble Lord has requested. We recognise that some significant events for all faiths will be taking place during this lockdown, and I am sure that this will be kept under review by the Government.

**Baroness Eaton (Conservative):** My Lords, the number of people suffering from mental illness and depression is rising during this pandemic. At such times, many people experience real spiritual hunger and wish for guidance. Where do they go if places of worship are closed? ... As my noble friend said, churches and places of worship have become extremely Covid compliant. Can my noble friend the Minister recognise that and provide flexibility for Covid-compliant places of worship? ...

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, my noble friend will be pleased to know that the members of the places of worship task force have made that precise point to the Prime Minister: that public worship is Covid-19 secure; that it is essential to sustain our service; that it is necessary for social cohesion and connectedness; that it is important for the mental health of our nation; and that it is an essential sign of hope. ...

**Lord Harries of Pentregarth (Crossbench):** Although it is true that churches are remaining open for private prayer, is it not important to recognise that the Christian faith is essentially a corporate activity? ... Similarly, Islam is no less a communal religion. ...

**Lord Cormack (Conservative):** My Lords, my noble friend has not given a single shred of evidence as to why churches should not be open for public worship. ...

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, I recognise that this is a difficult time for people of all faiths. ... we should also recognise that British Hindus will not be able to celebrate their version of Christmas—Diwali—during this period, and there is also the birthday of Guru Nanak for British Sikhs. We understand that these are sacrifices but, as someone who, during the first lockdown, lost his mother, who was very much a believer, spent three days in hospital before she died and said her rosary every day, I understand what it means to have faith. ...

I invoke the name of the Chief Rabbi, who told me that people of faith tend to live longer and have a better quality of life precisely because they converge in a communal way.

**Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench):** My Lords, is there not a grave danger that, in our

increasingly secular society, too little account is taken of people's religious sensibilities, when millions of people from a variety of faiths live in this country? Do we not underestimate the importance of people's sacramental and spiritual needs, denial of which not only threatens the principle of religious freedom but jeopardises people's personal well-being, as the Minister acknowledged? What other European countries have taken such draconian powers? ...

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Alton, makes a very important point. We should look to international comparisons to understand how places of worship have played a part in the spiritual well-being of people while not accelerating the virus. We need the data on that and as soon as it is available in this country it will be published at the earliest opportunity ...

**Lord Lilley (Conservative):** ... Does the fact that we are forbidden to worship God and encouraged to work in the economy but obliged to obey the rules of the state, even in the absence of any evidence, suggest that the Government put the state at the top of the list of things that they value?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** ... Those who made this difficult decision feel that there can still be a form of communal worship, as many people of faith have gone through the experience of going to mass or a service in a mosque via Zoom or other technology. That shift has taken place. It is not the same, but even the service I went to was very limited in capacity but many more were participating remotely. ...

**Lord Balfe (Conservative):** My Lords, I draw the Minister's attention to the statement from Cardinal Vincent Nichols on behalf of the Catholic hierarchy. He said that, "we have not yet seen any evidence whatsoever that would make the banning of communal worship, with all its human costs, a productive part of combating the virus."

That is a very clear statement on behalf of all the Catholic bishops. The right honourable Sir Edward Leigh MP, the president of the Catholic Union ... states in a letter to the Prime Minister: "We have seen no evidence of people meeting for church services contributing to the spread of the virus in this country."

He has, however, suggested that the Government, as an exception, could allow religious services as long as all those attending apply online beforehand. A number of churches are using this method. Are the Government prepared to move even an inch on this, because there has not been a single statement in this debate in favour of what they are doing?

**Lord Greenhalgh:** My Lords, I hear what my noble friend said, and I point to the Prime Minister's remarks in the other place. He said that this was a burden on people of faith, but he reminded everybody that this was only for 28 days. He offered the hope—the candle in the darkness—that, if we got this right, we would be able to go back to something much more like normal life before Christmas. The first day of Advent falls towards the end of this period; as we know, the period will be kept under review.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-11-03/debates/3225ABA8-5630-4FAF-AC61-9A484E93BCE5/Covid-19PlacesOfWorship>

*The Prime Minister's remarks of 31 October, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-new-national-restrictions>

## House of Lords Written Answer

### Racial Discrimination

**Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat) [HL9062]** To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to address racism.

**Baroness Berridge:** The Government's Race Disparity Audit (RDA) and its

website, Ethnicity Facts and Figures, was launched in October 2017. The website is a world first and has been welcomed internationally for its open and data-driven approach to highlighting inequalities of outcomes.

In response to its findings, Government has taken action to address disparities in criminal justice, increasing diversity in employment, mental health, school exclusions, and barriers to progress for young people.

To date, the Race Disparity Unit has worked across Whitehall and with local authorities to co-produce interventions to address disparities. These include:

- In the last 12 months, we have undertaken work to improve trust between police forces and the local communities that they serve, including increasing diversity in the police workforce and developing additional training
- We continue to provide targeted employment support in twenty areas around the country with high rates of ethnic minority unemployment to boost earning potential
- Last year, we announced measures to drive change in tackling inequalities between ethnic groups in higher education, and the last 10 years have seen a significant increase in the rates of 18 year olds from ethnic minority groups going to university;
- And we are acting on the findings of the Public Health England Review into disparities in the risks and outcomes of COVID-19 to ensure we take the right steps to protect and minimise the risks to vulnerable groups.

In addition, this year the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities was established and is examining all aspects of continuing racial and ethnic disparities in Britain. The Commission aims to set out a new, positive agenda for change - balancing the needs of individuals, communities and society, maximising opportunities and ensuring fairness for all.

It is building on the work of the Race Disparity Unit. The Commission is carrying out a deeper examination of what the causes of these disparities are, and is seeking to establish what works to address them effectively.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-12/hl9062>

*The website referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/>

*The Public Health England Review referred to above can be read at*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/908434/Disparities\\_in\\_the\\_risk\\_and\\_outcomes\\_of\\_COVID\\_August\\_2020\\_update.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908434/Disparities_in_the_risk_and_outcomes_of_COVID_August_2020_update.pdf)

## UK Parliament Early Day Motion

**John Spellar (Labour) [1089] Places of Worship** – That this House recognises the considerable role played by places of worship of all faiths in providing support to communities and individuals; is deeply concerned at the impact on mental health and personal wellbeing, especially on the the elderly, of the closure of places of worship during the period of new national covid-19 lockdown restrictions; calls on the Government to publish the evidence that the banning of communal worship is an effective part of controlling the covid-19 rate of infection; and urges the Government to urgently engage with faith leaders to reach a better arrangement for the period of the new national covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57663>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Imports: Israel

**David Simmonds (Conservative)** [102224] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with Israeli companies on exporting to the UK UV-light technology developed in Israel to kill germs.

**Edward Argar:** We are aware of the emergence of UV-light technology for infection prevention and control and are monitoring evidence in relation to its use in healthcare premises.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-12/102224>

### House of Lords Written Answer

#### Palestinians: Olives

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL9384] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they plan to take, if any, to protect olive groves and farmland in Palestine from damage by Israeli settlers.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The UK condemns any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We recognise that there can be an increase in assaults on Palestinian farmers, the destruction of olive trees and the stealing of produce coinciding with the Palestinian olive harvest, which began earlier this month. We have expressed our concerns to the Israeli Government on a number of occasions. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population. We welcome the efforts of Israeli authorities to address settler violence, and urge them to thoroughly investigate every instance and bring those responsible to justice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-20/hl9384>

### Department for International Trade

**Updated guidance: Trade with Israel from 1 January 2021**

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/summary-of-the-uk-israel-trade-and-partnership-agreement>

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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