



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answers

Places of Worship: Covid-19

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative): What assessment the Government have made of the transmission rate of covid-19 in places of worship where social distancing restrictions were in place. [908778]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Kelly Tolhurst): We are grateful to our faith communities for their efforts in ensuring that their places of worship are as covid-secure as possible. However, the view of the scientific community, including the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, is that there is a greater risk of the virus spreading indoors and where people gather. Regrettably, this means that places of worship are currently closed for communal prayer but remain open for individual prayer.

Andrew Rosindell: ... Given the serious implications of criminalising worship and the hardship it has caused churches and religious communities, will the Government commit to publishing their evidence base and to consulting fully and widely with faith groups before any future decisions on applying restrictions to worship are made?

Kelly Tolhurst: I do not underestimate the concern that this has caused for our religious communities, but the evidence from the scientific community, including SAGE, shows that the virus spreads quicker indoors and where people gather and interact. We are incredibly grateful to those who have taken part in the places of worship taskforce for their support and advice. We continue to call on their expertise and that of all major faith groups ahead of the regulations ending on 2 December, and we will continue to have those conversations over the next two weeks.

Janet Daby (Labour): The Government created a places of worship taskforce in May, but the taskforce has been ignored and has repeatedly not been consulted on these very consequential decisions during the pandemic. Does the Minister agree that our people of faith do not deserve to be an afterthought for the Government but must instead be respected, and will she commit to the Government meeting weekly with the taskforce to avoid this problem being repeated?

Kelly Tolhurst: I have to disagree strongly with the hon. Lady's assertion that the

taskforce has not been consulted. It has been led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. We have listened to the views of the community leaders and individuals around the table, and evidence has been shared. I can agree to her call for a weekly meeting, because the taskforce already meets weekly.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-11-16/debates/903F68A8-D2A8-413F-8919-35E5AD808368/PlacesOfWorshipCovid-19>

House of Commons Written Answer

Hezbollah

Conor McGinn (Labour) [113588] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 22 July 2019 to Question 277618 on Hezbollah, whether it remains her policy to not collect data on the number of Hezbollah members or supporters in the UK.

James Brokenshire: The Government takes proscription offences seriously. However, investigations into the activities of proscribed organisations or individuals who may be members or supporters of proscribed organisations are an operational matter for the police and intelligence agencies. It would not be appropriate to publish data on intelligence related matters.

The Government publishes quarterly national statistics on the use of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent relevant legislation in Great Britain. This includes information on arrests, charges and convictions for proscription offences. The most recent publication up to year ending June 2020, was published on 17 September on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-june-2020>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-10/113588>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-07-16/277618>

House of Lords Written Answers

Census: Ethnic Groups and Religion

Lord Lea of Crondall (Non-affiliated) [HL9854] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have any plans to make changes in the 2021 Census to the questions on (1) religion, and (2) ethnicity, used in the 2011 Census of England and Wales; and if so, what any such changes are.

Lord True: The Census (England) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 2020/560) set out the questions for Census 2021 in England and include facsimiles of the paper questionnaires. The religion question is the same as that asked in the 2011 Census. For the ethnic group question, two substantive changes to the question used in 2011 have been made:

- a new tick-box response option for 'Roma'
- a write-in option for those selecting 'African background' within the 'Black, Black British, Caribbean or African' high-level category.

People can still declare another religion or ethnicity, even if it is not a tick-box response option.

The parallel Census (Wales) Regulations 2020 were made by Welsh Ministers and laid before the Welsh Parliament.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-02/hl9854>

Religious Buildings: Coronavirus

Lord Alton of Liverpool (Crossbench) [HL9811] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they consulted the Places of Worship Taskforce before announcing the closure of places of worship as part of the national COVID-19 restrictions in England planned from 5 November; what assessment they have made of any issues resulting from churches' COVID-19 safety measures; and what assessment they have made of whether places of worship are more likely to facilitate the spread of COVID-19 than schools and universities.

Lord Greenhalgh: The Places of Taskforce met on 2 November. In addition, roundtables have been held with the country's major faith groups to discuss the guidance.

Discussions with our faith groups at these meetings, as they have been throughout the pandemic, have been extremely helpful. They have provided us with an opportunity to share information with our faith groups, as well as hearing of their concerns. We will continue to draw on the expertise of the Taskforce in the coming days.

I am very grateful to our faith communities for their efforts to ensure their places of worship are as Covid-secure as possible. However, the evidence from the scientific community, and from SAGE, points to an increasing rate of infection overall. We therefore need to reduce the level of interaction and the number of gatherings that take place, and with regret, places of worship are closed for communal prayer.

The regulations now in force will expire on 2 December, at which point we hope to be able to be able to ease restrictions.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-02/hl9811>

Religious Buildings: Coronavirus

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL9846] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they plan to amend the regulations underpinning the new national COVID-19 restrictions in England from 5 November to allow churches and other places of worship to remain open for both private prayer and limited services; and if not, why not.

Lord Greenhalgh: Regulations came into force on 5 November that places of worship in England must close for communal prayer. They are however permitted to open for individual prayer, and to record or stream to broadcast. In addition, funerals are also permitted and can be attended by a maximum of thirty people.

The regulations are in place until 2 December, at which point we hope to be able to ease restrictions.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-02/hl9846>

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

COVID-19: Updated guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities>

Faith, Race and Hate Crime Grants scheme announces £1.8 million in project support

The Faith, Race and Hate Crime Grants scheme invited established community groups and civil society organisations across England to apply for funding for projects that champion the government's commitment to building a diverse and tolerant society for all faiths and races. ...

Anne Frank Trust UK will receive a grant of £204,000 to run 'Back Together, Stronger

Together' projects in the North West and the East of England.

School workshops, peer education and in-school ambassadors will directly address antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, enabling young people to discover shared values across different communities of faith, race, and social groups. ...

Faith Minister Lord Greenhalgh said: In this country we believe in freedom within the rule of law. We are all free to love and not to hate. This government will not tolerate hate towards anyone because of who they are.

We stand full square in support of all communities that suffer from prejudice and discrimination and we must build a shared future in this country.

The pandemic has hit faith communities hard with the closure of communal worship during the two lockdowns. This funding is part of our comprehensive support for them. Our faith communities instinctively love their neighbours.

Chief Executive of the Anne Frank Trust, Tim Robertson said: We are delighted with the support from MHCLG, which will enable young people to lead the change in pushing back on prejudiced discriminatory ideologies based on race and faith. This will be a real step forward in building community cohesion, especially during the disruption and uncertainties of the Covid pandemic. ...

The following organisations have been awarded funding under the scheme:

English Football League Trust

Anthony Walker Foundation and Agent Academy

Youth Sport Trust

New Vic Theatre

Anne Frank Trust UK

The Faith and Belief Forum

Manningham Housing Association

Newcastle United Foundation

Solutions Not Sides

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/faith-race-and-hate-crime-grants-scheme-announces-1-8-million-in-project-support>

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See also the House of Commons written answer "Hezbollah" in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Lords Written Answers

West Bank: Demolition

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL9965] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 29 October (HL9333) that they "call on both parties to avoid any provocative action which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical", what provocative action has been taken by the occupiers of buildings which have been demolished by the government of Israel since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is deeply complex. Actions by both sides have damaged trust. We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution, including terrorism, anti-Semitic incitement, settlement expansion, and the demolition of Palestinian property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We

are encouraging both sides to maintain calm and avoid taking actions which make peace more difficult to achieve.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-03/hl9965>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-10-19/hl9333>

West Bank: Water Supply

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL9893] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about reports of the destruction of water pipes which has led to the water supply being removed for Maghayir al-'Abid and Khirbet al-Majaz, near the South Hebron Hills.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is concerned by the continued destruction of Palestinian structures by Israeli authorities. The Minister of State for the Middle East raised our concern about demolitions of structures in the South Hebron Hills with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October. Also on 29 October, the UK Ambassador to Israel raised demolitions in this area, and throughout the West Bank, with the Israeli Authorities. On 19 October, officials from the British Consulate Jerusalem visited communities in the South Hebron Hills to reiterate UK support for those facing demolitions and evictions. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances such destruction by an occupying power is contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The UK has also raised concerns over access to water in the Occupied Palestinian Territories with the Israeli authorities, including stressing the urgent need for Israel to take immediate and practical measures to improve the current situation and ensure fair distribution of water in the West Bank and Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-02/hl9893>

Palestinians: Politics and Government

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL9890] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they support the proposal by the President of the Palestinian Authority to hold a peace conference about the independence of Palestine as a state.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is committed to making progress towards a two-state solution. We remain a strong supporter of all efforts to promote peace. We are in close consultation with international partners about how to encourage the parties to reverse negative trends on the ground, including through a regional approach to peace, and encouraging meaningful bilateral negotiations. We believe that negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between Israelis and Palestinians, supported by the international community. We call on both parties to make constructive and open steps towards a return to dialogue and a return to cooperation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-02/hl9890>

UK Parliament Early Day Motions

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) [1139] Israeli annexation of Palestinian land – That this House is deeply alarmed by the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements; notes that, despite the temporary suspension of formal annexation plans, Israel has accelerated the construction of illegal settlements across the West Bank to its fastest pace since 2012; recognises that settlement expansion amounts to the de facto annexation of territory, and needs the same robust international response as formal annexation; acknowledges that Israel's displacement of Palestinian communities to establish Jewish only settlements, with different rights allocated depending on ethnicity, is being referred to by many political

analysts and legal scholars as an example of apartheid; and calls on the Government to take effective measures in response.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57718>

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) [1140] Demolition of Palestinian homes – That this House strongly condemns Israel’s destruction of the entire Palestinian village of Khirbet Hamsa al-Foqa; is appalled that 73 people, including 41 children, have been made homeless in the largest incident of forced displacement in the West Bank for years; notes that 2020 has seen the highest level of Palestinian home demolitions in four years, despite the covid-19 pandemic, which has left over 800 people homeless many of who are children; is alarmed that JCB equipment is being supplied to Israeli forces for the destruction of Palestinian structures, and that the UN Human Rights Office has listed the British company as sustaining illegal settlements; and calls on the Government to immediately ban all UK trade with illegal Israeli settlements, and take action to prevent equipment supplied by British companies, including JCB, from operating in them.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57719>

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Other Relevant Information

Woolf Institute

How We Get Along: The Diversity Study of England and Wales 2020

Executive Summary

<https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/assets/file-downloads/How-We-Get-Along-Executive-Summary.pdf>

Report

<https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/assets/file-downloads/How-We-Get-Along-Full-Report.pdf>

Appendix

<https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/assets/file-downloads/Appendix-Complete.pdf>

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Lack of hate crime recording means victims and their needs too often remain invisible, OSCE’s human rights office says

With the publication of its annual Hate Crime Report ... the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) underscores the need for police to record hate crimes in order to ensure that victims are recognized and receive the support they so urgently need.

Behind every hate crime is a painful and often traumatic story of physical and psychological injury, fear and threat. Victims of hate crime are targeted for who they are and for characteristics intrinsic to their identity, and which they share with others. Recording such crimes and offering support to those affected is therefore key to ensuring the security of individual victims, their communities and society as a whole.

The data published today show that in many countries there are mechanisms in place to record and collect comprehensive data on hate crimes. However, a large number do not provide police and prosecutors with the tools and knowledge they need to recognize, record and effectively investigate such crimes. This frequently deprives hate crime victims

of the opportunity to access much-needed specialist support.

ODIHR's hate crime dataset is the largest of its kind worldwide, and gathers together information both from official and civil society sources. A total of 39 OSCE states reported official hate crime data to ODIHR for 2019, including 25 states that provided figures classified by bias motivation. The dataset includes a record number of 3,207 statistical and 3,757 descriptive hate crime incidents reported by civil society, which translates into a minimum of 4,621 hate crime victims. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/470415>

2019 Hate Crime Data

<https://hatecrime.osce.org/what-do-we-know>

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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

**** closes in 3 days**

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>

Independent Faith Engagement Review (closing date 11 December 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence>

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