



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Holocaust

European Commission

Speech by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day

... For a German like me, it will always be something very special to speak on this occasion. I feel a deep responsibility. ...

Because antisemitism strikes at the heart of our values: humanity, religious freedom, equality. Antisemitism is a poison for our society. It is up to all of us to fight it. To prevent it. And to eradicate it.

In Europe, we are grateful, that more than 75 years after the Holocaust, Jewish life is thriving again – in schools and kindergartens, in synagogues and in trendy, kosher restaurants. In the heart of our communities. In the middle of our everyday lives. That Jewish people feel at home in Europe makes us both incredibly grateful – and humble. And it is a reminder for us: We must never remain silent, when Jewish citizens in Europe are exposed to hatred and harassment again.

But we also know that antisemitism is not buried deep in the past. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how quickly antisemitic conspiracy myths can spread. Disinformation and denials of facts are everywhere on the net – with antisemitic narratives circulating. In recent years we have also witnessed a growing number of attacks on Jewish communities. Like in the German city of Halle, where on the day of Yom Kippur in 2019 an attacker killed two people going about their normal life near the synagogue. Once again, in the heart of Europe, Jewish citizens had to fear for their lives. This act shocked our entire Union. And it demonstrated that antisemitism did not end with the Shoah. We must fight it relentlessly wherever it shows its ugly face.

Today, this is more important than ever. The last survivors are passing away. And for many of our young people, the events of the Holocaust seem to belong to a far away and distant past. Some have never even heard of it. Remembering the Shoah is our shared global responsibility. Holocaust survivors overcame their need to forget and they spoke about the unspeakable – to prevent history from repeating itself. It is impressive how they continue to reach out to young people despite their age. Their stories are a testimonial to the immeasurable strength of the Jewish people. Their power of endurance. Their will to

survive. We must continue to tell their stories. ...

The EU will contribute to this mission. This year we will present the first-ever European strategy to combat antisemitism. Holocaust remembrance and education will be an important aspect in this strategy. And we will increase our funding for projects on Holocaust Remembrance and education. In addition, last week we have launched the campaign #ProtectTheFacts, which pushes back Holocaust distortion – together with the UN, UNESCO and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

We back up our fight against Holocaust distortion and denial by legislation, too. With our Digital Services Act we make clear that online platforms must take greater responsibility for their role in disseminating and promoting such material. Because where there are attempts to deny the Holocaust, it is Europe itself that is called into question.

Dear Friends, the duty to remember is for all of us. And it has to be passed down from generation to generation. Young people need to know the facts. They are particularly exposed to Holocaust distortion on the net. We need to teach them about the Holocaust and the fragile nature of human societies.

Because it is the young who in the future will have to keep our solemn promise:

Never Forget!

To read the full transcript see

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_361

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

Israeli Settlements

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Non-affiliated) [HL12242] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about the proposed settlement at Givat Hamatos.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution, including settlement expansion within the West Bank. Both the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa made clear our opposition to settlement advancement in the sensitive location of Givat HaMatos on 21 January. The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa raised construction in Givat HaMatos with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 18 January and urged the Government of Israel not to proceed. The British Embassy Tel Aviv also urged the Israeli Authorities to cease the construction process in a meeting alongside European counterparts on 19 January. The UK's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace, and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. Settlement expansion is also a counterproductive move in light of the positive developments of normalisation agreements reached between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. We call on Israel to halt settlement expansion immediately.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-18/hl12242>

The statements referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-statement-on-israeli-settlements-january-2021>

and

<https://twitter.com/DominicRaab/status/1352214644052684803>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL12259] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report by B'Tselem A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: this is apartheid, published on 12 January.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK has not made an assessment of this report. It is the policy of this government that any judgment on whether serious crimes under international law have occurred is a matter for judicial decision after consideration of all the available evidence, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. As a friend of Israel, we have a regular dialogue, encouraging the Israeli government to do all it can to uphold the values of equality for all. The UK also engages with Israel on issues of concern related to its occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv and Consulate-General in Jerusalem work closely with all sectors of Israeli and Palestinian society to encourage tolerance and progress towards peace. The UK position on the Middle East Peace Process is clear: we support a negotiated settlement leading to a two-state solution. A two state solution is the only way to preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity. The UK has urged the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work together to meet their obligations under the Oslo Accords, and to work towards a sustainable solution to the conflict. We also call on all parties to abide by International Humanitarian Law and to promote peace, stability and security.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-18/hl12259>

The report referred to above can be read at

https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202101_this_is_apartheid_eng.pdf

Jerusalem: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL12262] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact on East Jerusalem of reports that the government of Israel intends to displace the Palestinian community in that area and replace it with Israelis.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We regularly make clear our concerns about evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem to the Israeli authorities, both bilaterally and in co-operation with like-minded diplomatic partners. These practices cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians, call into question Israel's commitment to a viable two-state solution and, in all but the most exceptional of cases, are contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-18/hl12262>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Gaza: Israel

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the (1) physical, and (2) economic, risks to (a) farmers, and (b) fishermen, in Gaza of the extent of the buffer zones in Gaza being changed by the government of Israel.

Gaza: Agriculture and Fisheries

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL12258] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that farmers and fishermen working within the borders of Gaza designated by the government of Israel have been targeted by the Israel Defense Forces; and what steps they plan to take in response to such reports.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK remains concerned about the use of live ammunition and excessive force by the Israel Defense Forces. While Israel has the right to self-defence, it is vital that its actions are proportionate and seek to avoid civilian casualties. We regularly raise with the Government of Israel the urgent need

to ease all access and movement restrictions on Gaza, including agriculture and fishing limits. This would help to restore the agricultural and fishing industries as regular alterations to the zone, often as a punitive measure, cause uncertainty and insecurity. The UK would like to see a permanent increase in the size of the fishing zone off the coast of Gaza in line with the limit of 20 nautical miles stipulated in the Oslo accords. We continue to stress to the Israeli authorities the damage that their restrictions on movement, access and trade are doing to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza and that supporting legal trade for Gazans is firmly in Israel's long-term interests.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-18/hl12257>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-18/hl12258>

West Bank: Olives

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL12260] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the statistics compiled by the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Camping coalition which suggest that over 8,400 olive trees have been uprooted or burned by the Israel Defense Forces and Israeli settlers in the West Bank in 2020.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of the difficulties facing Palestinian olive growers. Attacks on olive groves are particularly painful to Palestinians given their status as a national symbol and the sole source of income for many Palestinian farmers. We have expressed our concerns to the Government of Israel and security officials about the destruction of olive trees and the prevention of access to them on a number of occasions. The UK condemns any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population. We urge them to thoroughly investigate every instance and bring those responsible to justice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-18/hl12260>

The statistics referred to above are not available online, although they have been widely reported by Middle East media outlets.

Palestinians: Elections

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL12261] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that all Palestinians are able to vote freely in (1) the elections for the legislature on 22 May, and (2) the presidential election on 31 July.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We welcome President Abbas' announcement of dates for legislative and Presidential elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the first time since 2006. We encourage the Palestinian leadership to work toward strong, inclusive, accountable and democratic institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights. Free and fair elections are an important and necessary step. The UK will work closely with the Palestinian Authority and international partners to support this. We are supportive of Hamas-Fatah reconciliation attempts, and of the Palestinian Authority returning to resume government functions in Gaza, helping to improve the dire humanitarian and economic situation and restore effective and accountable governance.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-18/hl12261>

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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>

**** Domestic Abuse Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2709>

Committee Stage, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-02-01/debates/3D604C08-7BD7-46DF-A1F6-71B8A7DB91B5/DomesticAbuseBill>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

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

Freedom of Speech (Universities) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2820>

Genocide Determination Bill

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

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

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

Marriage (Approved Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2537>

Marriage (Authorised Belief Organisations) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2795>

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

Introduction of a statutory opt-out system for organ donation for Northern Ireland
(closing date 19 February 2021)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/organ-donation>

Human Rights Act Review (closing date 3 March 2021)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/93/human-rights-joint-committee/news/138635/call-for-evidence-the-governments-independent-human-rights-act-review/>

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19
(closing date not stated)

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

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