



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answers

Far-right Online Conspiracy Theories

Gill Furniss (Labour): What steps [is the Minister] taking to prevent the spread of far-right conspiracy theories online. (911818)

The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage): The Government take the issue of disinformation, including far-right conspiracy theories, very seriously, and DCMS is leading work across Government to tackle this. Our counter-disinformation unit brings together monitoring and analysis capabilities across Government, and we work closely with social media platforms to ensure that swift action is taken and authoritative sources of information are promoted.

Gill Furniss: To tackle far-right extremism and conspiracy theories that undermine our vaccine roll-out, new legislation is urgently needed. Social media companies must take responsibility for the content shared on their platforms. Can the Minister therefore update the House on when the online harms Bill will be introduced, and give her assurances that the Bill will achieve this vital aim, which will keep our country safe?

Caroline Dinenage: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As I have said, tackling disinformation in all its forms, including vaccine disinformation, remains a key priority for the UK. As we set out in the full Government response, the online safety Bill will introduce a duty of care that requires companies to address online harms such as harmful disinformation that could impact on people's health and safety on their platforms, and that legislation will be put forward this year.

Chi Onwurah (Labour): Mr Speaker: "No one should have to accept racist abuse as the price to pay for being in the public eye", the Secretary of State assured footballers. No one should have to accept racist abuse full stop, and no one should be subject to extremist grooming or have their lives endangered by anti-vax misinformation, but they are, and for 10 years Conservative Governments have refused to act. As the head of UK Counter Terrorism Policing tells us, extremism has become so widespread online that it "cannot be policed". Will the Minister say what steps she has taken to protect us and, please, no more vague assurances for the future?

Caroline Dinenage: Of course, we want the internet to be a very safe space for all

users, and we are very clear that what is unacceptable online is just as important as what is unacceptable offline. That is why we are absolutely committed to tackling extremist views, racist views and views that promote violence, hatred and division against individuals and against communities. We want the internet to be a safe space for all users, which is why the online harms framework will require companies to have very clear terms and conditions about how they would respond to such hateful content, and they will be expected to implement those conditions consistently and transparently.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-02-04/debates/1E6B8245-7C7B-4971-96C9-630C3F88C62E/Far-RightOnlineConspiracyTheories>

Topical Questions: Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Saqib Bhatti (Conservative): If I were to make a report of online abuse to a social media company, it is likely that a team halfway across the world would look at it and that I would not get a response for a few weeks. It may even not be classed as abuse, because the team may not understand nuances in the English language. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be better for social media companies to use UK-based teams that understand nuances in the English language—what is abuse and what is not—and are therefore quicker in responding and perhaps more effective in stamping out online abuse and racism? (911775)

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, and that is something that I have raised with social media companies. I know that many people are concerned that the moderators are not actually based in the United Kingdom, and speed of response is crucial. Through our online safety Bill, we will require social media companies to take swift and effective action against criminal abuse online, and as part of that we will put in place effective user reporting and redress mechanisms. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-02-04/debates/04FA2F18-774A-4D00-AE3E-F1A618E3384C/TopicalQuestions#contribution-8AA05D00-311E-40FF-AC5A-C325FFEB0094>

House of Commons Written Answer

Religious Buildings: Coronavirus

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [143703] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for what reasons places of worship can remain open during the 2021 covid-19 national lockdown.

Eddie Hughes: We understand the importance of communal worship, and the positive impact that this has on people's mental and spiritual health during a very difficult time for us all. We have worked hard with faith leaders to produce guidance for the safe use of places of worship. We are grateful for the efforts of Faith Leaders, and their communities, to follow that guidance and to keep worshippers safe. Their efforts mean that all places of worship that comply with COVID-secure guidance, including implementing strict social distancing, wearing face coverings ensuring that worshippers do not mingle with others outside of their households have been able to remain open for communal worship during the latest period of restrictions.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-26/143703>

House of Lords Written Answer

Care Homes: Ministers of Religion

Lord Patten (Conservative) [HL12664] To ask Her Majesty's Government what

assessment they have made of the current arrangements for chaplains of all faith groups to visit residents in care homes.

Lord Bethell: In the face of a new variant of the virus we have acted to protect those most at risk in care homes and ensure visits can go ahead safely in some form. Visits to care homes can continue to take place with arrangements such as outdoor visiting, substantial screens, visiting pods or behind windows. Close-contact indoor visits are not currently allowed. However, visits in exceptional circumstances, including end of life, should always be supported and enabled.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-27/hl12664>

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Holocaust

United Nations

'Voices of resistance, resilience and courage' – UN News podcast bears witness to lives beyond the Holocaust

More than three generations have passed since the end of the Second World War, but antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia that continue to poison societies around the world, makes the lessons learned then, arguably more important today than ever before.

"Stories of Holocaust survivors are stark reminders of the need to fight injustice and stop hatred", said Tracey Petersen, Manager of the UN's Department of Global Communications' Education Outreach Section.

As time continues to silence the voices of those who bore witness to the horrors of the Holocaust, our latest podcast series from UN News, [In their words](#), records for posterity the honest and still shocking testimony of survivors.

"Each story is a stark testimony of witness to the horrors of racism and antisemitism left unchecked, and the catastrophic loss to the world, wreaked by genocide", said Ms. Petersen.

Preserving the testimonies of those who survived the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their racial collaborators in the 1930s and 1940s, each of the series' four episodes features a personal conversation with a remarkable Holocaust survivor, focusing on a defining chapter of their lives.

Referring to their stories as "voices of resistance, resilience and courage to consider a future when the Holocaust had all but destroyed their pasts", Ms. Petersen said: "The power of a survivor's voice is that it reminds us of the human cost paid, and our responsibility to our fellow humans to respond to injustice so that all can live with dignity and in peace". ...

To read the full press release, and to listen to the podcast, see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1083872>

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House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Coronavirus

Diana Johnson (Labour) [146813] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the vaccination roll-out programme in Palestine.

Diana Johnson (Labour) [146814] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department will take to ensure that the citizens of Palestine receive the covid-19 vaccine.

James Cleverly: The UK remains committed to ensuring equitable access to effective vaccines as demonstrated by our £548 million contribution to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines. Through match funding, the commitment was leveraged to encourage other donors to commit \$1 billion in 2020. We are pleased to note that the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) will be among the first to benefit from the COVAX scheme with delivery of a first batch anticipated in mid-February.

We remain in regular, close contact with the Palestinian Authority to discuss their plans for access to safe COVID-19 vaccines in the OPTs, including rollout of the doses provided through the COVAX scheme.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-01/146813>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-01/146814>

Palestinians: Remote Education

Robert Halfon (Conservative) [145776] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 26 January 2021 to Question 140776, how many Palestinian children received copies of UNRWA's self-learning material; and what steps UNRWA is taking to retrieve that material and counter harmful educational messages.

James Cleverly: We contacted UNRWA directly regarding this issue. UNRWA informed us that they had identified the material in question through its own regular monitoring and took swift action to correct the issue. The Agency also conducted a review to address any education materials in breach of its policies. UNRWA has reported that these materials are no longer circulated and are not used in current lessons. The issue was rectified by November 2020.

We continue to monitor the situation to ensure self-learning materials remain in line with UN values.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-29/145776>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-20/140776>

United Nations

Hard-Hit by COVID-19, Occupied Territory Reveals Urgency of Two-State Solution, Global Solidarity, Secretary-General Tells Palestinian Rights Committee

... The pandemic has had a severe impact on the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. The public health system has been pushed to the brink due to the occupation and the fragile

socioeconomic, humanitarian and political situation. ...

The Special Coordinator [for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland,] continues to encourage Israel to help address the priority needs of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory — and to support COVID-19 vaccine availability more generally, which is in line with Israel’s obligations under international law.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and bring an end to the suffering. I reiterate my call on the Government of Israel to immediately halt all settlement activity, which is a major obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Persistent acts of violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as Israeli movement and access restrictions and other violations of international humanitarian and human rights law exacerbate mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians and drive us further from peace. ...

[Palestinian] President Mahmoud Abbas’s call for an international peace conference under the auspices of the United Nations, and an expanded Middle East Quartet with considered preparation and involvement by the key parties, provide a positive opportunity to advance peace in the region. ...

The holding of elections in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, will be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity. It will give renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine. Elections are a vital part of building a democratic Palestinian State founded on the rule of law with equal rights for all. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20569.doc.htm>

... Inequalities under Occupation Deepened amid COVID-19, Permanent Observer Points Out ...

... Riyadh Mansour, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, said the past year deepened existing inequalities, which were even more trying for Palestinians, already under occupation for decades. Emphasizing that Palestine must not be the exception to the lofty goal of leaving no one behind, he said “building back better” makes it imperative to revive global cooperation, led by the United Nations, in addressing chronic injustices and inequalities. Describing the Palestinian Rights Committee as a symbol of multilateralism, he expressed regret over false accusations of anti-Semitism levelled against it, and urged all States to cooperate with its important efforts in the quest for peace. ...

... the Chair [Cheikh Niang (Senegal)] ... [noted] that, despite COVID-19, Israel has relentlessly pursued the expansion of its illegal settlements, including in and around East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Its recent announcement that it intends to construct nearly 800 new housing units in the occupied West Bank, in addition to more than 12,000 units started in 2020, offers further proof of Israel’s annexation plans, so does the “apartheid road” in the Jerusalem area separating Palestinians and Jewish settlers, he said.

“The Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and the occupation itself are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace,” he declared. The best way to promote conditions for lasting peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians is to renounce all forms of violence, as well as the “politics of fait accompli”, and to return to the negotiating table, with a view to reaching a comprehensive solution that assigns to each side the right to a sovereign State. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/gapal1435.doc.htm>

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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/2021-02-03/debates/7B42D0F0-32EA-44F9-812B-11326A7B6BEE/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>

Stage 2, Justice Committee

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13097&i=118558#ScotParlOR>

Notice of amendments

<https://beta.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/current-bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill/stage-2/daily-list-of-amendments-3-february-2021.pdf>

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