



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Faith Schools: Admissions

**Edward Leigh (Conservative)** [157004] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make it his policy to remove the 50 per cent cap on faith-based admissions to religious schools.

**Nick Gibb:** The Government strongly supports schools with a religious character and recognises that they are often high performing and popular with parents.

We are pleased that the Voluntary-Aided scheme has allowed the creation of new Catholic and Church of England schools, but we recognise that some groups, including the Catholic Church, feel unable to participate in the free schools programme because of the 50% cap on faith admissions.

We will continue to keep the 50% cap under review and are open to discussing this issue with groups who provide schools with a religious character, including the Catholic Church.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-23/157004>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### West Bank: Palestinians

**Julie Elliott (Labour)** [159300] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the recent report from Israeli human rights organisations, Breaking the Silence, Physicians for Human Rights Israel and Yesh Din, A Life Exposed: Military invasions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, what discussions

he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the ending of that practice; and what assessment his Department made on the effect of that practice on the community.

**James Cleverly:** We are aware of the report by Yesh Din entitled, 'A Life Exposed: Military invasions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank'. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including the Israeli security forces' rules of engagement. While we recognise Israel's legitimate need to deploy security measures, we encourage them to deploy these in a way which minimises tension and to use appropriate force.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-26/159300>

*The report referred to above can be read at*

[https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Exposed\\_Life\\_2020/Exposed\\_Life\\_ENG.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Exposed_Life_2020/Exposed_Life_ENG.pdf)

### **Israeli Settlements**

**Patrick Grady (SNP)** [157200] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterparts on the issue of illegal settlements in Palestine.

**James Cleverly:** Both the Foreign Secretary and I made clear our opposition to settlement advancement in the sensitive location of Givat HaMatos on 21 January 2021. I also raised settlement construction in Givat HaMatos with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 18 January 2021 and urged the Government of Israel not to proceed. Officials from the British Embassy in Tel Aviv have also urged the Israeli Authorities to cease the construction process in a meeting alongside European counterparts on 19 January 2021. 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-23/157200>

*The Foreign Secretary's comment, referred to above, can be read at*

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

### **Gaza: Coronavirus**

**Louise Haigh (Labour)** [157219] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assurances he has received that Israel will allow future covid-19 vaccines into the Gaza strip.

**James Cleverly:** We welcome the steps that the parties have taken so far to coordinate responses to the COVID-19, including the arrival of the first shipment of vaccines from the Palestinian Authority into Gaza on 17 February, with the approval of Israel. We encourage further cooperation and dialogue in this regard. The UK Ambassador in Tel Aviv raised the issue of vaccines with the Israeli Authorities on 24 February, encouraging the Government of Israel to continue to facilitate the transfer of vaccines to the Palestinian Authority when required. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem are in regular contact with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities respectively, and will continue to raise timely and appropriate access to COVID-19 vaccines.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-23/157219>

### **West Bank: Demolition**

**Stephen Farry (Alliance)** [157336] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations his Department (a) has made and (b) plans to make to the Israeli Government on recent trends in the number of demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank.

**James Cleverly:** The UK Ambassador in Tel Aviv raised ongoing demolitions with the Israeli Authorities in a meeting alongside like-minded partners on 25 February 2021. I called on Israel to stop demolitions on 5 February 2021 and raised my concerns about demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures with the Israeli Ambassador on 29 October 2020. UK officials from the British Consulate in Jerusalem have made regular visits to areas at risk of demolition and eviction to reiterate UK support for those communities. The UK is clear that in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to Palestinians and is harmful to the peace process.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-23/157336>

*The Minister's call to stop demolitions, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1357723513940045824>

### **Israel: Palestinians**

**Stephen Farry (Alliance)** [157337] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations he has made to the Israeli Government on reports of the Israeli Army allegedly seizing EU humanitarian aid intended for the Palestinian community of Humsa Al Bqai'a in the Jordan Valley.

**James Cleverly:** I called on Israel to stop demolitions on 5 February 2021. I also raised our concern about demolitions with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October 2020, and issued a statement outlining the UK's concern about the demolitions of structures in Humsa Al-Baqai'a on 6 November 2020. Officials from the British Consulate General Jerusalem visited Humsa Al-Baqai'a on 6 November 2020 to reiterate UK support for the community. The UK provides funding to the West Bank Protection Consortium, which is coordinating with the Palestinian Red Cross and the United Nations to provide emergency shelter to the community of Humsa Al-Baqai'a, and determine the community's long-term needs. UK senior officials raised demolitions with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 10 November 2020. The UK also urged the Government of Israel to end demolitions of property in the West Bank at the UN Security Council on 21 December 2020.

We are focused on preventing demolitions from happening in the first place through our legal aid programme, which supports Bedouin communities and Palestinians facing demolition or home eviction in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We continue to urge the Government of Israel to develop improved mechanisms for zoning, planning and permitting in Area C for the benefit of the Palestinian population, including by facilitating local Palestinian participation in such processes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-23/157337>

*The Minister's call to stop demolitions, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1357723513940045824>

*The statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/demolition-of-village-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territories-uk-statement>

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## Foreign Affairs

### Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

#### **UN Human Rights Council 46: UK statement for the Interactive Dialogue with the with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief**

We remain deeply concerned about the scale of abuses and violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief: no one should suffer because of their conscience.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his work over the past five years, and look forward to engaging with him on his report on combatting anti-Muslim hatred, as well as on Christian persecution and other forms of discrimination.

The United Kingdom is home to many thriving religions and beliefs. We reject all forms of intolerance and hate. Internationally, we are concerned by the societal impacts of the pandemic including rising hate speech, misinformation and conspiracy theories which target minority faith communities in different countries.

We are also concerned about actions of governments such as Sri Lanka, where the government's mandatory cremation policy for those deceased due to Covid-19 has impacted Muslim and Christian minorities in particular. We hope this practice will soon cease and we are ready to provide technical support and evidence to counter misinformation.

This year, we will continue to assess the pandemic's impact on human rights.

What steps can we, the international community, take to ensure it does not fuel further global intolerance towards religious and belief minorities?

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-46-uk-statement-for-the-interactive-dialogue-with-the-with-the-special-rapporteur-on-freedom-of-religion-and-belief>

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## Other Relevant Information

### UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

#### **Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to Human Rights Council: Islamophobia is a Result of Structural Discrimination Stemming from Negative Stereotypes**

... Ahmad Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, highlighted that expressions of discrimination, hostility and violence motivated by anti-Muslim bias were serious obstacles to the enjoyment of human rights. The dangers of Islamophobia were manifested through violent attacks against Muslims across the globe, with the majority of the human rights violations often gaining little media attention. Entrenched and widespread essentialisations that depicted Muslims as cultural "others" validated discrimination. The report confirmed the alarming rise of right-wing extremist groups that peddled conspiracy theories about Muslims and that increasingly transcended borders by propagating hate online. This extended to media, academia, schools, healthcare settings and parliamentary bodies, with Muslim men cast as violent and sexist, while Muslim women oscillated between victims in need of rescue and terrorists hidden behind a veil.

Evidence gathered for this report made clear that Islamophobia was a function of structural discrimination stemming from negative stereotypes. The report recalled State duties under international law to eliminate all forms of discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief and emphasised a human rights response to Islamophobia. Nothing in the report suggested that the high threshold to impose limits on free speech should be

lowered. To operationalise the human rights duties of States, Mr. Shaheed offered several practical recommendations to States, civil society, the media and Internet companies, employers and the United Nations system to work with Muslims, rather than on Muslims, to address and mitigate the impacts of Islamophobia. In a world of intensifying bigotry against all who were 'different' from the preferred norms of the powerful, everyone must hold accountable those who sought to divide, and affirm the equality of all regardless of their religion or belief. ...

... speakers expressed concern about the alarming rise of Islamophobic incidents in a number of countries in the form of online hate, restrictions, exclusion and governmental persecution, as well as the stigmatisation of Muslim women. Policies aimed at fighting anti-Muslim hatred must be an integral part of promoting the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, and involve efforts in the areas of teaching, education, media platforms, integration, social inclusion policies, employment and non-discrimination. ... Unregulated social media platforms had further amplified and reinforced negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of Muslims. ...

Ahmad Shaheed ... stressed that the perceived conflict between freedom of expression and discrimination was a fake one ... Hateful discourse became hateful when there was inequality involved and it was used to dehumanise other people. The problem was not defining Islamophobia, the problem was defining and countering violent extremism as it was done in such a broad and vague manner. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26843&LangID=E>

**Countering Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim Hatred to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief (A/HRC/46/30)**

[https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_46\\_30.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Documents/A_HRC_46_30.docx)

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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>

#### **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>

Scottish Parliament Information Centre Briefing: Consideration prior to Stage 3

<https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnp.azureedge.net/published/2021/3/4/613b4dd7-5451-4415-9f8a-d283631f974a/SB%2021-16.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

**The future of the [Welsh Government] Equality and Inclusion Funding Programme**  
(closing date 30 March 2021)

<https://gov.wales/future-equality-and-inclusion-funding-programme>

**Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS): Documenting the Lives of Ethnic and Religious Minorities in a Time of Crisis** (closing date 11 May 2021)

[bit.ly/evensurvey](http://bit.ly/evensurvey)

**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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