



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

Antisemitism

Diana Johnson (Labour) [170565] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to statistics from the Community Security Trust that 2019 recorded the highest number of anti-Semitic hate crimes since 2007, what steps his Department is taking to reduce anti-Semitic hate crime.

Eddie Hughes: Antisemitism has absolutely no place in our society, which is why we have taken a strong lead in tackling it in all its forms. We are providing £14 million this year, and provided over £65 million to date, for the Protective Security Grant to protect Jewish schools and community buildings.

In October 2019 the Communities Secretary wrote to universities and local authorities to urge them to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of Antisemitism and there has been significant uptake of the definition since. We have also appointed Lord Mann as the Independent Adviser on Antisemitism, who has been providing advice on the most effective methods of tackling antisemitism in communities

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-17/170565>

Social Media: Harassment

Emma Hardy (Labour) [170720] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he has to tackle racist and misogynistic abuse in newspaper comment sections.

John Whittingdale: The government is committed to a free and independent press, and does not intervene in what the press can and cannot publish. We are clear, however, that with this freedom, comes responsibility, which media organisations must take seriously. It is important that there exists an independent self regulatory regime to ensure that the press adheres to a wide set of clear and appropriate standards, and to offer individuals a means of redress where these are not met.

The majority of traditional publishers—including 95% of national newspapers by circulation — are members of The Independent Press Standards Organisation

(IPSO). A small number of publishers have joined The Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS). These regulators issue codes of conduct which provide guidelines on a range of areas including discrimination, and set out the rules that members have agreed to follow.

Complaints about comments on news websites can be directed to the publication itself, or to the appropriate self-regulator.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-17/170720>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Coronavirus: Weddings

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [143705] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to allow marriages to resume, under all circumstances, when the covid-19 local alert level tier system is reintroduced in England.

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [143706] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for what reason marriages can only take place under exceptional circumstances during 2021 covid-19 national lockdown.

Nadine Dorries: Marriages should only take place in exceptional circumstances - for example, where one of those getting married is seriously ill and not expected to recover or is to undergo debilitating treatment or life-changing surgery.

We understand these rules are difficult but reducing social contact is paramount to protecting the National Health Service and saving lives. The Government keeps its restrictions under continual review and will make changes if the data and science support it.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-26/143705>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-26/143706>

Weddings: Coronavirus

Karen Bradley (Conservative) [170632] To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether dedicated wedding venues are permitted to hold covid-secure weddings in Stage 2 of the covid-19 roadmap.

Paul Scully: At Step 2, which will be no earlier than 12 April, weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are permitted for up to 15 people in COVID-19 Secure venues that are permitted to open or where a broader exemption applies.

Receptions can take place with up to 15 people in the form of a sit-down meal and in any COVID-19 Secure outdoor venue that is permitted to open. Such receptions must not take place in people's private gardens or public outdoor spaces.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-17/170632>

House of Lords Written Answers

Occupied Territories

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL14031] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the decision by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 3 March to investigate individuals in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, what assessment they have made of the risk to British Armed Forces personnel of investigation by the ICC into alleged war crimes, regardless of the adequacy of investigations into the allegations within the UK.

Baroness Goldie: I refer the noble Baroness to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey), in the House of Commons on 9 March 2021 to the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) in response to Question 160692.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-09/hl14031>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-01/160692>

The decision referred to above can be read at

https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2021_01165.PDF

A partly dissenting decision from Judge Péter Kovács can be read at

https://www.icc-cpi.int/RelatedRecords/CR2021_01167.PDF

A partly separate decision from Judge Perrin de Brichambaut can be read at

https://www.icc-cpi.int/RelatedRecords/CR2021_01166.PDF

Counter-terrorism

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (Non-affiliated) [HL14054] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Williams of Trafford on 1 December 2020 (HL10439), what assessment they have made of any Islamist teaching in mosques in the UK; what assessment they have made of the number of Imams in the UK who cannot speak English; and what plans they have to require services in mosques in the UK to be conducted in English.

Baroness Williams of Trafford: Religious organisations and faith-based institutions may recruit religious leaders from overseas via our T2 Minister of Religion route. The Immigration Rules governing this category require applicants to demonstrate a strong command of the English language in order to qualify for a visa.

Muslims make an enormous contribution to British society and have done so for centuries. Islam is a religion observed peacefully by over a billion people worldwide and we remain clear that Islamist extremism is not true Islam. Whether through Islamism or any other ideology, the Government is committed to tackling those who spread views that promote violence and hatred against individuals and communities in our society, and that radicalise others into terrorism.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-09/hl14054>

Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

COVID-19: Updated guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships>

Scottish Government

Places of worship in Level 4 can reopen from Friday

... People living in all parts of Scotland will be able to attend places of worship in gatherings of up to 50, where there is space for physical distancing, from Friday 26 March.

Updated guidance publishing on Friday will also allow people to travel between Level 4 areas to attend their usual place of worship following sustained progress suppressing Coronavirus (COVID-19). ...

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: ... “The return of collective worship in greater numbers is an important change that I hope will be especially welcomed as we head towards important religious festivals over the next few weeks. That we are in a position for Na h-Eileanan Siar to move to Level 3 reflects their success in reducing transmission in recent weeks.

“I am grateful to everyone who has shown solidarity, compassion and love to one another

by sticking to incredibly tough rules and restrictions. By following the rules, all of us have saved lives – we've helped keep the virus under control, and helped to create the situation we are now in, where we can now start to plan our route out of lockdown. ...

<https://www.gov.scot/news/places-of-worship-in-level-4-can-reopen-from-friday/>

Coronavirus (Covid-19) update: First Minister's statement - 23 March 2021

... I am pleased to confirm today that from Friday, collective worship will again be permitted in groups of up to 50 – if the premises can support such a gathering with appropriate physical distancing.

This is an important change– and I hope that it will be especially welcomed as we head towards important religious festivals over the next few weeks. ...

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-update-first-ministers-statement-23-march-2021/>

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See also the House of Lords written answer “Occupied Territories” included in the Home Affairs Section above.

House of Commons Written Answers

Coronavirus: Vaccination

Miriam Cates (Conservative) [138541] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what coordination is taking place between the UK and Israel on covid-19 vaccine deployment.

Nadhim Zahawi: The Government recognises that a global pandemic requires global solutions. It is essential that the Department is regularly in discussions with other countries, including Israel, on a wide range of COVID-19 issues to share learnings and collaborate internationally on the vaccination programme. Feedback from these discussions, where relevant, is used to improve the United Kingdom vaccination programme.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-15/138541>

Jerusalem: Internally Displaced People

Stephen Timms (Labour) [169783] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 March 2021 to Question 164342, what assessment he has made of whether the forcible transfer of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem potentially constitutes a war crime.

James Cleverly: 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. The UK regularly engages with Israel on issues of concern related to its occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including evictions and demolitions. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances evictions and demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-16/169783>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-08/164342>

West Bank: Demolition

Stephen Timms (Labour) [169780] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the UK's diplomatic efforts to end demolitions and settlement expansion in the West Bank; and if he will make a statement.

James Cleverly: The UK has a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation. We do not hold back from voicing or raising concern about Israel's actions when warranted. We continue to believe that the best way to advance a two state solution is through dialogue, including by urging an end to settlement expansion and the demolition of Palestinian property in the West Bank. As a proud friend of Israel, and one which has stood up for Israel when it faces bias and unreasonable criticism, we will continue to urge Israel to not take steps such as these, which move us away from shared goals of peace and security.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-16/169780>

House of Lords Written Answers

Palestinians: Elections

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL13974] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that all adult Palestinians in East Jerusalem are able to vote in the upcoming Palestinian elections; and what plans they have for the independent observation of the elections in all the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have welcomed 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. This includes encouraging the Government of Israel to allow elections in East Jerusalem. 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/2021-03-08/hl13974>

West Bank: Internally Displaced People

Lord Oates (Liberal Democrat) [HL13988] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the statement by Save the Children on 3 February that the "number of displaced Palestinian children is at a four-year high as demolitions in the West Bank continue".

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of the Save the Children statement on 3 February. Our Ambassador in Tel Aviv has raised the issue of ongoing demolitions with the Israeli Authorities, most recently in a meeting alongside like-minded partners on 25 February. The Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa called on Israel to stop demolitions on 5 February 2021 and raised his 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, including Palestinian children, and is harmful to efforts to promote peace.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-08/hl13988>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.savethechildren.net/news/number-displaced-palestinian-children-four-year-high-demolitions-west-bank-continue>

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

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

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Kim Johnson (Labour) [1680] Israeli permit system: children and parents in Gaza

That this House condemns the inhumane practice of separation of children in Gaza who need medical treatment from outside the Strip from their parents, who are routinely denied accompanier passes by Israel; notes that since January 2018, Physicians for Human Rights Israel has assisted over 130 children including breastfed babies who needed to exit Gaza for medical treatment whose parents were not granted permits so could not be by their side during operations, chemotherapy and other treatments; further notes that as of October 2020, COGAT representatives noted in the Knesset that 40 per cent of children exited for medical treatment without their parents; it expresses profound concern at the serious psychological and physical implications for the children and the violation of their right to health; adds its voice to calls from the Physicians for Human Rights Israel, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Academy of Pediatrics, the International Society of Social Pediatrics and Child Health and others to ensure that every child exiting Gaza will be accompanied by at least one of their parents and be able to access treatment in a speedy manner; and calls on the Government to use its multilateral and bilateral relations with Israel and do everything in its power to ensure it upholds its commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to end its horrific ongoing separation of sick children from their parents.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/58293>

House of Lords Library

Letter from Mr Saleem Al-Za'anoun, Speaker of the Palestine National Council, to the Lord Speaker, regarding the violations and escalation of the Israeli occupation of the rights of the Palestinian people.

<http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0256/Speaker-Palestine National Council to Lord Speaker.pdf>

Letter from Lord Fowler, the Lord Speaker, to the Deposited Papers Clerk regarding a document for deposit in the Library

<http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2021-0256/Commitment letter.docx>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Updated travel advice: Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated travel advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

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Other Relevant Information

Equality and Human rights Commission

Reasonable steps to preventing workplace harassment

The recent Employment Appeal Tribunal decision in [Allay \(UK\) Ltd v Gehlen](#) shines a light on the kind of harassment that some still face in the workplace, but also shows how it can be successfully challenged. ...

Legal protection from racial harassment comes from the Equality Act 2010. That legislation defines racial harassment as unwanted conduct relating to race which has the purpose or effect of either violating another person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

What one person might choose to describe as 'banter' might amount to unlawful harassment and both the employment tribunal and the appeal tribunal had little hesitation in finding that was the case here.

Harassment can occur in any setting, not just the work place. But if it does occur in the workplace then the employer can be liable unless they can show they took all reasonable steps to prevent harassment. ...

There is no fixed number of steps that an employer must take to prevent harassment and protect its workers. What is reasonable for the employer to do will vary from employer to employer depending on the size and nature of the business. However, our guidance emphasises that policies and procedures should be effective and training should be refreshed at regular intervals. ...

Workplaces should never be intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environments and employers have a crucial role in protecting workers' dignity in relation to all forms of harassment. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/blogs/reasonable-steps-preventing-workplace-harassment>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Historic consensus on freedoms of religion and expression at risk, say UN experts

United Nations human rights experts said today digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic had facilitated a new wave of stigma, racism, xenophobia and hate targeting minorities and those considered "others", often promoted by authorities themselves, either directly or indirectly. Recalling the consensus achieved since the 24 March 2011 adoption of a Human Rights Council resolution on combating intolerance, they said in the following statement that States must ensure pluralism and stamp out negative stereotyping:

"On the 10th anniversary of [Resolution 16/18](#), we welcome the Human Rights Council consensus around the issue of fostering freedom of religion or belief, reaffirming freedom of opinion and expression and combating advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

Resolution 16/18 is remarkable for its eight action points that commit all States to take specific measures at the national level in policy, law and practice, to address intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief and its root causes. These measures include building collaborative networks; creating mechanisms to identify tensions; encouraging training of government officials in effective outreach strategies; discussing root causes of discrimination; speaking out against hatred; criminalising incitement to imminent violence; combating negative stereotyping of persons through education and awareness building; and promoting open debate as well as interfaith dialogue. ...

Sadly, a new wave of stigma, racism, xenophobia and hate has been amplified by digitalisation, social networks, and aggravated in the context of the pandemic, targeting minorities and those seen as 'others' with impunity. At the same time, the policing of opinions and expressions online, the targeting of certain religious communities for reasons of national security, the use of counter-terrorism or public order laws to suppress legitimate expression have reinforced negative stereotypes and may contribute to incidents of intolerance, discrimination and violence against persons based on their religion, belief or opinions in any region of the world. ...

Many States have resorted to restricting free speech as a way to addressing hate speech but any limitation of speech must remain an exception and strictly follow international human rights standards. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26937&LangID=E>

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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

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 7 days**

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

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