



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

Religious Buildings: Coronavirus

Sam Tarry (Labour) [181158] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether he plans to publish further guidance on the full reopening of places of worship during the covid-19 outbreak.

Eddie Hughes: Faith communities across the country have steadfastly observed nationwide restrictions and we are immensely grateful for their support and cooperation. I am pleased that, in large part because of the outstanding work of faith leaders and the efforts of their communities to observe guidance and keep people safe, places of worship have been able to remain open - including for communal worship - during recent restrictions.

The Guidance for the Safe Use of Places of Worship was updated on 12 April to reflect measures to ease restrictions from Step 2 of the Roadmap. We will keep the guidance updated as decisions on further Steps in the Roadmap are taken, and continue to support faith communities to understand and implement guidance to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-04-14/181158>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december>

The Roadmap referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Religious Buildings: Coronavirus

Sajid Javid (Conservative) [182034] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to ease the

covid-19 restrictions on singing inside places of worship.

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [183186] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will make it his policy to allow singing in churches in step three of the covid-19 road map.

Eddie Hughes: We understand the importance of singing to all of our faith communities but, due to the transmission of COVID-19 through droplets and airborne particles, it has been essential to limit this to control the spread of the virus. We have been working closely with the Places of Worship Taskforce and faith communities to facilitate this and are grateful for their support.

Currently singing can take place outdoors on the grounds of a place of worship and this can include the congregation taking part. Indoors it is currently only possible for small groups of singers to perform, and the congregation cannot join in. It is important that we take a cautious approach in easing restrictions, so that we can see the impact of the steps we are taking before moving to the next step. For that reason, we will continue to keep guidance and restrictions under review, in line with the changing situation. As soon as we are able, we will update our advice further. We do not wish to keep restrictions in place for any longer than we have to. This is in line with wider guidance for performing arts across all sectors.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-04-16/182034>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-04-19/183136>

Home Office

White supremacist group, Atomwaffen Division, banned in the UK

The white supremacist group, Atomwaffen Division, has today become a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK, with National Socialist Order listed as its alias, following an Order, which was laid in Parliament on Monday (19 April), coming into force.

This means that members of Atomwaffen Division or those who invite support for the group could be jailed for up to 10 years.

The group and its alias have now been added to the [list of proscribed organisations](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/white-supremacist-group-atomwaffen-division-banned-in-the-uk>

Scottish Government

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Updated guidance for the safe use of places of worship

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Chris Evans (Labour Co-op) [181253] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support the creation of the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

James Cleverly: The UK remains committed to making progress towards a two-state solution. We support the objectives of the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace and continue to engage with the Alliance for Middle East Peace and Biden administration to discuss the Fund's development.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-04-15/181253>

Jerusalem: Palestinians

Rupa Huq (Labour) [183224] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations his Department has made to the Israeli authorities on evictions of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah.

James Cleverly: We regularly make clear our concerns about the evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem to the Israeli authorities and the Municipality of Jerusalem. The Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, prohibits demolitions or forced evictions absent military necessity.

The UK Ambassador in Tel Aviv raised ongoing demolitions with the Israeli Authorities in a meeting alongside like-minded partners on 25 March 2021. I raised the issue of evictions of Palestinians from their homes, with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October 2020, and the British Embassy in Tel Aviv raises this issue regularly with the Israeli authorities. 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. On 8 April 2021, the UK Consul General Jerusalem visited families at risk of eviction in Sheikh Jarrah, restating UK opposition to evictions of Palestinians from their homes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-04-19/183224>

Israel: Demolition

Sarah Olney (Liberal Democrat) [182077] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make it his policy to ensure that representations made in (a) public statements and (b) bilateral relations with Israel refer to forcible transfer on the matter of illegal demolitions that violate (i) international criminal law and (ii) international humanitarian law.

James Cleverly: I continue to maintain an active dialogue with regional partners on the matter of demolitions, and frequently raise our objections in bilateral conversations with my Israeli counterparts. The UK urged the Government of Israel to end demolitions of property in the West Bank at the UN Security Council on 25 March 2021. On the same day, the British Ambassador in Tel Aviv raised ongoing demolitions with the Israeli authorities in a meeting alongside like-minded partners. I called on Israel to stop demolitions on 5 February 2021 and raised my concerns about the 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 efforts to promote peace.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-04-16/182077>

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

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

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Supporting elections and working towards a sustainable two-state solution: Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen at the Security Council briefing on the Middle East

Let me open today by welcoming the decision taken on 7 April by the United States to restore funding to the Palestinian people and to UNRWA. This move will improve the lives of thousands of Palestinians ...

It is our hope that positive moves such as these will help to build an atmosphere of trust between the parties. The United Kingdom will continue to encourage deeper cooperation on economic issues, and will work with the parties, and our international partners, to push for the re-establishment of formal Israeli-Palestinian mechanisms, such as the Joint Economic Committee and its sub-committees.

Mr President, following elections held in Israel on 24 March, we look forward to working with a new Israeli government, when it is formed. We also strongly support the forthcoming elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. ...

Mr President, we have been watching recent events on the Temple Mount/ Haram al Sharif very closely. We recognise that Jerusalem holds huge significance and holiness for Jews, Muslims and Christians. We reiterate the fundamental necessity of maintaining the Status Quo at the Holy Sites, in particular the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif. ...

Illegal Israeli settlement building remains the biggest physical threat to the two-state solution. Plans by Israel to advance settlements in Har Homa in south east Jerusalem, north of Bethlehem, risk causing further damage to the prospects for a viable Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem. We call on Israel not to advance these plans.

Demolitions of Palestinian buildings, and evictions of Palestinians from their homes – across the West Bank, but in particular in East Jerusalem – have a similar detrimental impact on the physical character of a future Palestinian state. ...

Incitement, antisemitism and acts of terrorism are utterly unacceptable, and the United Kingdom is swift and clear in its condemnation of any such acts. ...

We share concerns expressed by UN experts last week about the rising levels of settler violence across the West Bank. ...

It is our firm belief that the contours of such a solution remain: a negotiated two state solution, leading to a safe and secure Israel, living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/supporting-elections-and-working-towards-a-sustainable-two-state-solution>

Dominic Raab: Palestinian elections must be credible & inclusive, with Palestinians allowed to vote in East Jerusalem. Today I met Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr Malki to discuss this issue, calling for all parties to progress and support free & fair elections.

<https://twitter.com/DominicRaab/status/1385321414778032135>

James Cleverly: Yesterday I discussed with Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr Malki the UK's strong commitment to a two-state solution as the only viable route to lasting peace. We continue to oppose unilateral actions in OPTs, including settlement advances such as Har Homa.

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1385576420857065472>

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

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

United Nations

Amid Resurgent COVID-19, Palestinian Expectations High Ahead of Long-Awaited Elections, Special Coordinator Tells Security Council

Expectations are running high among Palestinians ahead of their first elections in nearly 15 years, even as a resurgence of COVID-19 hits the West Bank and Gaza, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process told the Security Council today.

A successful outcome of the elections can open the way towards reconciliation with Israel and advance peace in the wider region, said Tor Wennesland, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative. "The holding of credible Palestinian elections is a crucial step towards renewing the legitimacy of national institutions and re-establishing Palestinian national unity," he added. ...

The United Nations is engaging with the Palestinian parties and the Central Elections Commission to prepare for the elections, he continued, emphasizing that all sides must ensure the right of Palestinians across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip to cast their ballots free from intimidation, arrest, detention or interrogation. Highlighting the formidable threat posed by COVID-19 throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, he said the daily infection rate in Gaza is at its highest level since the pandemic started in March 2020. Many hospitals in the West Bank are running at or near full capacity, he added. Israel continues to vaccinate segments of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, he pointed out, while underlining the need for more vaccines and for accelerating the process. ...

He went on to reiterate his call for Israel to cease the demolition and seizure of Palestinian property throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with its obligations under international law, and to let Palestinians develop their own communities. ...

Returning to the Palestinian elections, he said a growing number of young people are expected to cast ballots for the first time and to help shape their own political future. Besides renewing the democratic legitimacy of the Palestinian government, he added, the polls should also pave the way to uniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single legitimate national authority — a key step towards reconciliation and advancing the Middle East peace process. ...

The Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine said the people have registered overwhelmingly to participate in the upcoming elections, clearly demonstrating their thirst for democracy. ...

Turning to the pandemic, he cited widespread suffering from the horrific impact of COVID-19, expressing gratitude for international support. However, that suffering could have been alleviated had Israel upheld its obligations, including vaccinating those under occupation, instead of reserving vaccinations for those in contact with the Israeli people ... He went on to state that Israel's settlement expansion erodes the possibility of a viable Palestinian State, underlining the need to address that threat immediately. Expansion dramatically alters the landscape, with the blatant objective of unlawfully seizing Palestinian land to erase the 1967 borders, which are indispensable to a two-State solution, he said. ...

The representative of Israel said five Iranian protesters arrested for "waging war on God" will be murdered for speaking out against the world's most brutal regime, Iran, whose grave human rights violations remain the most substantial threat to peace and security in the Middle East. That should be the focus of debates on the region, he emphasized.

Noting that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) now reports that Iran is enriching uranium to 60 per cent, which is not necessary for civilian purposes, he said its initiative is therefore a blatantly military one. However, the international community continues to ignore Iran's provocative behaviour ...

Turning to the upcoming Palestinian elections, he asked how the Council will work with Palestine if Hamas increases its power, since the group's participation alone should be a concern, given that its list of candidates includes those who have carried out terrorist attacks. Citing UNRWA textbooks that contain anti-Semitic references, he said that unless they are overhauled and other measures taken, the Agency has no legitimacy to exist. He went on to oppose "slander" by the Palestinian Authority on vaccination efforts, stating that Israel has worked with the international community to help Palestinians since the pandemic began. ...

The representative of France expressed concern over the risk of de facto annexation of Palestinian territory and called upon Israel to renounce its settlement plans, including in East Jerusalem. ... Condemning rocket attacks from Gaza targeting residential districts in Israel, he vowed "France will never waver when it comes to Israel's security". ...

The representative of the United Kingdom welcomed the decision by the United States to restore funding to the Palestinian people and to UNRWA, saying that will improve the lives of thousands, particularly those most impacted by the occupation and by COVID-19. Expressing support for the upcoming elections, he said Palestinian voters deserve a free, fair and inclusive process, which the Government of Israel must help facilitate, in accordance with the Oslo Accords, including unhindered voting in East Jerusalem. ...

The representative of Ireland said that for a two-State solution to happen, strong, inclusive and accountable democratic Palestinian institutions based on respect for the rule of law and human rights are critical. ...

The representative of the United States said that his country's Administration has been very clear about its commitment to advancing a negotiated two-State solution and reengaging with the Palestinians. On 7 April, he recalled, the United States announced an additional \$235 million in economic, development and humanitarian assistance for the Palestinians, including \$150 million for UNRWA. Going forward, he pledged, the United States will re-engage with the Agency, its donors, host countries, and other Member States to address its long-standing challenges while also upholding its neutrality and zero-tolerance of racism, discrimination or anti-Semitism. He encouraged both the Palestinian Authority and Israel to refrain from unilateral steps that could exacerbate tensions and undercut efforts towards a negotiated two-State solution, such as the annexation of territory, settlement activity, demolitions, incitement to violence and providing compensation for individuals imprisoned for acts of terrorism. ...

The representative of the Russian Federation said his country is taking steps to support collective efforts for a just peace in the Middle East, including by proposing a ministerial conference of the Quartet and a meeting in the Quartet Plus format to overcome the current impasse. ... Calling upon both sides to exercise restraint, especially in the context of Israel's recent elections and the upcoming Palestinian ballot, he emphasized that Palestinians must be guaranteed the right to vote and to stand for election. Expressing concern over Israel's ongoing settlement activity, he stressed the need to alleviate the humanitarian and economic problems of the Palestinians, especially in the context of COVID-19, while urging both sides to work together on vaccinations. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14500.doc.htm>

TOP

House of Commons Debate

Human Rights: Xinjiang

col 1212 Nusrat Ghani (Conservative): ... Today, I am asking the House to consider whether the grounds for genocide are met. I know that colleagues are reluctant to use the word “genocide”. For many, the word will be forever associated with the horrors of Nazi concentration camps. I agree with colleagues that we should never diminish the unique meaning and power of the term by applying it incorrectly, but there is a misunderstanding that genocide is just one act—mass killing. That is false. Article 2 of the United Nations genocide convention says that genocide is “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”.

There are three points that I want colleagues to note. First, genocide is measured against intent. Secondly, intent to commit any one of the five acts of genocide is sufficient. Thirdly, and fundamentally, all five acts of genocide are evidenced as taking place in Xinjiang. Therefore, while we must never misuse the term “genocide”, we must not fail to use it when it is warranted. ...

col 1213 We are not alone. Countries around the world are declaring genocide, and Parliaments in Europe are watching us today and will take our lead. At a previous genocide debate, when we were shamefully denied a vote, I quoted the late Rabbi Sacks. When he was asked where was God during the holocaust, he responded that the question is not: where was God? The question is: where was man? Men and women in this House—the mother of all Parliaments—will do all we can to ensure that atrocities like the holocaust can never again take place. ...

col 1214 Yasmin Qureshi (Labour): ... This House has repeatedly heard evidence of sterilisation, mass extrajudicial internment, organ harvesting and modern-day slavery. Indeed, the Foreign Secretary himself described them as abuses “on an industrial scale” and as “mass torture”. ...

... it has become clear to all of us that the Government’s policy on genocide is untenable. They cannot continue to insist that the determination of genocide is for the courts, knowing that there is no court that can actually hear these cases. ... It is patently absurd to insist on this being a matter for courts, which will be blocked from acting. ...

col 1215 Since 1948, we have witnessed genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, northern Iraq and now China and Myanmar. That is not an exhaustive list. Indeed, some grave crimes against humanity go unreported in the mainstream media and are never classified as genocide. The response to these atrocities has always been inadequate. Whenever a genocide takes place, there is a collective wringing of hands, but the promise to break the relentless and devastating cycle of genocide has never materialised. How many times have we heard the words “never again”? ...

col 1216 Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative): ... Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, whose inquiry is ongoing, has said that his inquiry is “certain—unanimously, and sure beyond reasonable doubt—that in China forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience has been practiced for a substantial period of time involving a very substantial number of victims.” That is the organ harvesting of victims in the power of the state. I thought that we, collectively as nations, decided never ever to see this happen again. In the 1940s, Nazi Germany practised organ harvesting and strange science on people in captivity—mostly the Jewish people, but others, too. How can we hear that and lock it away in a box? How can we hear that and lock it away in a box? It is astonishing that we should even be thinking that it is just an item for debate. It is not. It is redolent of the terrible times that we and others went through, and we decided never again. But it is again, and on an industrial scale. ...

col 1216 ... we have evidence to show that a genocide is taking place, specifically of the Uyghur people, but very likely, as I said, of others like the Tibetans as well. We know that the Chinese have been killing members of the group and causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group. All these things are going on.

If we believe that there is evidence on every one of those counts, the question is: why have we not declared this a genocide? ...

col 1218 Afzal Khan (Labour): ... Report after report has highlighted the mounting evidence of human rights abuses and shown that Beijing has violated each and every act banned by the United Nations convention against genocide. ...

Because the words “never again” are utterly meaningless if we fail to act, history will remember us, and we have a moral duty to step in and stop these heinous crimes. Powerful interventions from faith communities, including the Board of Deputies of British Jews, have passionately called on the Government to support the genocide amendment, and the Jewish community has even drawn a parallel between the horrors in Xinjiang and the holocaust. Despite that, the Government continue to drag their feet on holding China to account. Instead, they put trade above human rights. They must continue to press the Chinese Government to close detention camps, cease indiscriminate surveillance and restrictions on religion and culture, and allow independent experts and UN officials proper access to Xinjiang.

After the genocides in Rwanda, Srebrenica and Darfur, we said, “Never again.” I hope that we can all agree that we cannot add Xinjiang to that list. ...

col 1219 Tim Loughton (Conservative): ... It is a shocking reality that genocides have never properly been called out and thwarted at the time that they happen—genocides against the Jews, genocides against the Muslims in Srebrenica, genocides in Rwanda, Cambodia and Darfur, and the many other genocides that go unnamed and are not properly detected ... I include in that list the Armenian genocide of 1915 and 1916, when 1 million to 1.5 million men, women and children died at the hands of the Ottomans. ...

col 1220 It is clear that what is happening is genocide. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden put it starkly: if a state-orchestrated and race-targeted birth rate plunge of two thirds in two years is not genocide, what is? If mass internment, slave labour, systematic rape, torture and live organ harvesting, mass sterilisation, womb removal, forced abortion, secretly located orphan camps, brainwashing camps and the psychological trauma of these combined atrocities do not amount to genocide, under any of the definitions, what does? ...

col 1222 Kirsten Oswald (SNP): ... Today, I would like to highlight, yet again, the work of a new campaign group co-founded by my constituent, Kirsty Robson. It challenges us to learn lessons from the holocaust and to break the cycle of impunity for perpetrators that allows atrocities to continue. Its work is very much needed now. ...

col 1223 East Renfrewshire is home to Scotland’s largest Jewish community, and every year I join events on and around Holocaust Memorial Day, which is a privilege and always gives me significant pause for thought. That is when we reflect on that dreadful event and say “never again.” But here we are, knowing that a genocide is unfolding—let us be clear: that is what it is—and yet the UK Government seem unwilling to do anything about it beyond ritual diplomacy.

We must recognise and act on the atrocities facing the Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in China. They cannot be ignored as the UK scrambles for trade deals. To help achieve that, yet again we are partnering with the Scottish Council for Jewish Communities to hold an event for the Jewish community to find out more about what is happening to the Uyghurs. We should all, including the Chinese Communist party, take a lead from that determination to learn the lessons from history. This must stop, and it is our responsibility to stand up and be counted to make that happen now. ...

col 1225 Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat): ... What is happening to the Uyghur people in

Xinjiang amounts to genocide as defined under the genocide convention. We are all used to assuming that genocide happens quickly—mass graves come to mind—but genocide can also happen more gradually: one baby not born, one identity forever altered by intimidation or indoctrination. On a mass scale it all leads to one end: the erasure of a people. So whatever its pace, it must be stopped. ...

col 1226 Of course a full determination and prosecution of genocide should be pursued through the United Nations and the international courts—we all agree with that—but while we know that this is going on, how can we ignore it? How can we watch our words and wait until a UN-led investigation is allowed in by a defensive and unco-operative Chinese state? It is not going to happen. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past, as we did with the Yazidis. In 2016, this place voted to recognise that a genocide was occurring, but then nothing happened and thousands died. ...

If we end up being proved wrong because an independent UN inspector goes in and is allowed to do their work, and it is shown that we all got the wrong end of the stick, I would welcome that. I would rather be wrong now than be on the wrong side of history later. ...

col 1228 **Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op):** ... On our watch, a nation on this Earth is persecuting its people for their culture and faith, for the hope they carry and for the peace they want to extend. Their rights are being replaced by systematic brutality. ...

We are being tested as to how we respond. We in the UK cannot be bystanders, and nor can we let any nation be so. ...

The Secretary of State says he needs a legal opinion to call China a genocidal state, so without a judgment or a court case, where is his alternative? With all the evidence to determine this genocide, this Parliament must not delay, and nor should this Government; there is no time. Each day, another truck pulls up and someone else disappears, then is stripped, then beaten, then electrocuted, then raped, then—the stories are too distressing. Women are reporting that, through sterilisation and abortion, their future is being denied. Their children are being taken; their lives are sucked from them. ...

col 1230 **Sally-Ann Hart (Conservative):** ... “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Those words, often misquoted and misattributed, can most accurately be traced back to the philosopher George Santayana. They now appear on tablets and plaques in museums, memorials and historical sites across the world. Most pertinently, they can be observed today in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp—the place where more than 1 million innocent men, women and children tragically lost their lives as a result of state-sponsored wholesale slaughter on an industrial scale. That concentration camp, and the words that can be found in it, should be taken by all of us who value human rights, including me and Members across the House, as a warning of the horror that humans are capable of when we are driven by our most base instincts. Instead of shying away from historical atrocities such as the holocaust, we must all strive to acknowledge and understand how they came to be, so that now and in the future such tragedies can actively be prevented. However, recent history teaches us that that is a lesson that humanity has yet to learn.

Since the holocausts from Rwanda to Cambodia and from Bosnia to Syria, tyrannical and totalitarian regimes have too often been able to discriminate against, persecute and murder segments of their populations with impunity, based on nothing more than someone's ethnicity or faith. Such actions too easily and too often culminate in mass slaughter and genocide. ...

col 1231 **Ruth Cadbury (Labour):** ... Every year on Holocaust Memorial Day, we confirm that we have a shared responsibility to fight the evils of genocide. Today's debate is about showing our fundamental commitment to human rights and specifically making clear our opposition to the horrific treatment of the Uyghur people and the other ethnic groups in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. ...

col 1232 **Tim Randall (Conservative):** ... Events in Xinjiang have been condemned by all right-thinking people, and I certainly join in that condemnation. There is the question of whether that amounts to genocide. ...

col 1233 Genocide is a crime, and it has been described as the crime of all crimes—it is the most heinous act that man can do to man—but there are limits to a Member of Parliament answering that question with authority. It is a legal question. The genocides of the 1940s and the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda were all adjudicated by courts. This House is not a court. As a Member of Parliament I can express a view on something, but I cannot adjudicate on a matter of genocide in the same way that I cannot adjudicate on, for example, a case of murder. ...

col 1235 **Imran Ahmad Khan (Conservative):** ... This is a genocide. More than 1 million Muslims, most of whom are Uyghurs, have been detained, indoctrinated, sterilised and tortured. We have not seen the systematic detention of an ethnic minority group on this industrial scale since the holocaust. This is not only an evil programme, designed to eradicate an entire culture, but an effort to profit off the back of human slavery, suffering and misery. ...

We, who live free, possess a moral duty to stand up to the Chinese Communist party and uphold the values of pluralism, decency and human rights. Doing nothing in the face of overwhelming evidence would render us complicit in this most monstrous crime. Enough of words alone. If the United Kingdom is to be regarded as a true defender of liberty, freedom and justice, we must act. The International Court of Justice's position on genocide could not be clearer: the obligation to prevent arises the instant that a state party believes that there is a risk of genocide. The case law states that we are obliged to do all we can to protect the very moment that we reasonably suspect genocide is a serious risk. As parliamentarians, we must do all we can to stop these atrocities. The time to act is now. ...

col 1236 **Fleur Anderson (Labour):** ... Language is a powerful tool, and we need to start calling the situation what it is: a genocide. Genocide is the intent to destroy a national, ethnic or religious group. That is what is happening in Xinjiang. ...

Two major independent analyses have investigated reports of alleged genocide in the Xinjiang region, and one of those was a formal legal opinion. Both reports conclude that there is sufficient evidence that the prohibited acts specified within the genocide convention and the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court have been breached with regard to the Uyghurs. How much more evidence do we have to keep on seeking before we declare the situation a genocide? One of the reports, from the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, conducted by over 30 independent global experts, found that the Chinese state is in breach of every act prohibited in article 2 of the genocide convention. ...

col 1238 **Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... I echo the request ... to lead calls for the 2022 winter Olympics to be moved from China. Allowing the genocide games to go ahead as planned is tantamount to the international community condoning the CCP's actions. ...

I stress that this would not be the first time that the Olympic games were played in the shadow of concentration camps. The 1935 request for a boycott of the Berlin games for the sake of minority and religious groups fell on deaf ears. We knew then, as we do now, the genocidal action that an authoritarian regime was taking against its religious minorities. More than 80 years later, when we see people with shaved heads, stripped of their belongings, lined up at gunpoint and loaded on to trains to dissident camps for no reason other than their peacefully held beliefs, those stark images should serve as a warning. Let us never again be forced to ask how the world could let that happen. ...

col 1241 **Stephen Kinnock (Labour):** ... Ideally, a competent international court would examine this evidence, but there is no prospect that either the ICC or the International Court of Justice will be able to do so, as this would require the consent of China. Beijing will also continue to prevent the United Nations from conducting a proper investigation in Xinjiang. ... With the international route to legal determination of genocide blocked by

China and the domestic route to legal determination blocked by the Government, it falls to Parliament to take action. ...

In February this year, an opinion by barristers at Essex Court Chambers led by Alison Macdonald QC provided a detailed legal assessment of all the available evidence. It concluded that there is a very credible case that the Chinese Government's actions constitute genocide. ...

In March this year, the Newlines Institute of Strategy and Policy in Washington also published a legal analysis that concluded that a genocide is taking place in Xinjiang. Importantly, given that the crime of genocide requires proof of intent, both opinions concluded that the atrocities that are being perpetrated against the Uyghur are not the random acts of rogue individuals, but the result of a conscious and carefully orchestrated campaign of oppression and persecution that is being conducted by the Chinese Government.

As a signatory to the 1948 genocide convention, the United Kingdom is legally bound to take all reasonable steps to both punish and prevent genocide. By passing this motion today, the House would be instructing the British Government to carry out those legal duties in relation to events in Xinjiang. ...

col 1243 The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): ... As we have heard from across the Floor, the situation faced by Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang is truly harrowing. We have repeatedly emphasised our grave concern at the serious and widespread human rights violations occurring in the region. There are credible reports of the extrajudicial detention of over 1 million Uyghur people and other minorities in political re-education camps since 2017, extensive and invasive surveillance targeting minorities, forced separation of children from their parents, forced sterilisation of women, systematic restriction on Uyghur culture, education and the practice of Islam, and the widespread use of forced labour.

The evidence of the scale and severity of the violations in Xinjiang is extensive. That includes, as the whole House knows, satellite imagery, the testimony of survivors, credible open-source reporting by journalists and academic researchers, and visits by British diplomats to the region that have corroborated reports about the targeting of specific ethnic groups. United Nations special rapporteurs and other international experts have also expressed their very serious concerns. ...

col 1244 In the face of that evidence, the United Kingdom has acted decisively. In March, the Government took the significant step of sanctioning four senior individuals responsible for the violations that have taken place, and which persist, against the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. We also designated the organisation responsible for enforcing the repressive security policies across many areas of Xinjiang. ...

On 12 January, we announced robust domestic measures to help to ensure that UK businesses and the public sector avoid complicity in human rights violations in Xinjiang through their supply chains ...

Working with our partners, we have built an international caucus of countries calling China out for its gross human rights violations and increased the diplomatic pressure for Beijing to change course. ...

The motion before the House is that the situation in Xinjiang amounts to genocide and crimes against humanity. The UK of course treats all allegations of genocide and crimes against humanity with the gravity they demand. As a nation, we have a strong history of protecting global human rights, but as the House is no doubt aware, the UK's long-standing position, like many countries around the world, is that determining whether a situation amounts to genocide or crimes against humanity is a matter for competent national and international courts, after consideration of all the available evidence.

col 1245 Genocide and crimes against humanity are among the most egregious of all international crimes. We believe ... that the question of whether they have been committed is for a competent court of law to decide. Genocide and crimes against humanity are

subject to a restrictive legal framework under international law. In particular, a finding of genocide requires proof that relevant acts were carried out with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Proving such intent to the required legal standard can be incredibly difficult to achieve in practice.

For these reasons, we do not believe it is right for the Government to make a determination in this, or in any other case where genocide or crimes against humanity are alleged. ...

The United Kingdom is committed to seeking an end to serious violations of international human rights law wherever they occur, preventing the escalation of any such violations and alleviating the suffering of those who are affected. Our approach has not prevented us from taking robust action to address serious human rights violations, as we have done and will continue to do in the case of Xinjiang. ...

col 1246 Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region are suffering crimes against humanity and genocide; and calls on the Government to act to fulfil its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide and all relevant instruments of international law to bring it to an end.

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-04-22/debates/6FA4F300-D244-443E-A48C-57378876DE54/HumanRightsXinjiang>

The Independent Tribunal into Forced Organ Harvesting from Prisoners of Conscience in China, referred to above, can be read at

https://chinatribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ChinaTribunal_JUDGMENT_1stMarch_2020.pdf

The Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy Report, The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention, referred to above, can be read at

<https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Chinas-Breaches-of-the-GC3.pdf>

The legal opinion by barristers at Essex Court Chambers, referred to above, can be read at

https://14ee1ae3-14ee-4012-91cf-a6a3b7dc3d8b.usfiles.com/uqgd/14ee1a_3f31c56ca64a461592ffc2690c9bb737.pdf

The Government announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-announces-business-measures-over-xinjiang-human-rights-abuses>

Westminster Hall Debate

Religious Minorities: Land Rights

col 346WH **Brendan O'Hara (SNP):** ... Article 13 of the [Iranian] constitution provides protection of named minorities such as the Zoroastrians and Christian and Jewish communities, but it specifically excludes the Baha'i. Article 19, however, says explicitly that "regardless of the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong" everyone in Iran has equal rights. That is reinforced by article 20, which says: "All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights".

Yet we know that the reality is very different. The Baha'i community, despite the protections afforded by the constitution, is afforded absolutely no protection in Iran. ...

col 347WH ... land rights for religious minorities is not solely an issue for the Baha'is or Iran. The atrocities perpetrated by Daesh in Syria and Iraq in the last few years, and the chaos in the aftermath of its military defeat, had a devastating long-term impact on minority

religious communities across the region. In Iraq, Christian, Yazidi and even Jewish communities that once flourished alongside their Muslim neighbours are decimated and dispersed—unable or, in many cases unwilling, to return, because of security fears. Persecution and bloody sectarian violence have reduced the number of Christians living in the Nineveh plain and the Erbil region from 1.5 million at the start of this century to a mere fraction of that number today. ...

Also, tragically, the Jewish community has of course all but disappeared, having been forced out of Iraq over many years. ...

col 348WH ... Archbishop Nathanael Semaan ... made the very relevant point that the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all have long and deep roots back to the land that we now know as Iraq. Abraham himself was reportedly born in the town of Ur Kaśdim in the south of the country. As the archbishop said, Iraq has a rich history of religious diversity, and an Iraq without that rich diversity is simply not Iraq. Although he was speaking specifically about Iraq, his words could easily be applied to many other countries in the region and indeed across the world, where many faith groups and communities have lived side by side in mutual respect and tolerance for many years. In too many cases, that is something that has gone completely, and in other areas we can see its final disintegration. ...

col 350WH **The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly):** ... Our bleak assessment is that Iran continues to violate human rights across the board, including, sadly, the right to freedom of religion or belief. While some faiths in Iran, most notably Christianity and Judaism, benefit from constitutional protection, in truth, there is widespread discrimination against all religious minorities, but it is markedly worse for unrecognised faiths, including the Baha'i. ...

col 351WH ... the UK is committed to defend the freedoms of religion or belief for all and to promote respect between different religions and non-religious communities. We have concerns, and when we have such concerns we raise them directly with Governments, including at ministerial level. We do not shy away from challenging those who we believe are not meeting their obligations, whether publicly or in private. We remain deeply concerned about the violations of the freedom of religion or belief in many parts of the world, including in Iran. Where this right is under attack, other human rights are almost always under threat as well. ...

col 352WH Let me end by reassuring the House that our commitment to defend freedom of religion or belief for all and to promote respect between religious and non-religious communities endures. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-04-22/debates/3B8A7BB3-A9BF-4D4A-AAC3-B07D14E43237/ReligiousMinoritiesLandRights>

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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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

New Plan for Immigration (closing date 6 May 2021)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>

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