



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

Social Media: Antisemitism

Elliot Colburn (Conservative) [3171] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to ensure that the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism is included in any discussions with a potential regulator on holding social media companies accountable for content hosted on their platforms.

Caroline Dinenage: The Government is committed to tackling racism, including the spread of antisemitic content online. On 12 May 2021, we published the draft Online Safety Bill, which sets out new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. Under a new legal duty of care, in-scope companies, including social media, will need to tackle illegal antisemitic content and activity on their services.

In addition, companies providing high-risk, high-reach services will need to assess the risk to adults of legal but harmful content on their services and set clear terms and conditions stating what legal but harmful material they accept (and do not accept) on their service. Companies will have to do this for both priority harms which the government will set out in secondary legislation and for any emerging harms they identify in their risk assessments.

These duties will apply to antisemitic hate speech, which does not meet the threshold of a criminal offence. Companies will need to enforce their terms and conditions consistently and transparently, and could face enforcement action if they do not. All companies in scope will be required to have effective and accessible user reporting and redress mechanisms.

From now onwards we will be working with stakeholders and parliamentarians alike on identifying priority harms, and they will be subject to the usual secondary legislation processes. Ofcom will be responsible for advising the government regarding the list of priority categories of harm, based on evidence of the prevalence and impact of harmful content. Government will not be bound to follow this advice.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-18/3171>

The Draft Bill referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985033/Draft_Online_Safety_Bill_Bookmarked.pdf

Social Media: Harassment

Chi Onwurah (Labour) [2283] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the algorithms used by social media firms to moderate hate speech and online abuse on their platforms.

Caroline Dinéage: Companies are not doing enough to prevent hate speech and online abuse.

The Online Safety Bill, which has now been published in draft, will require all companies to take swift and effective action against hate speech and online abuse. The Bill will ensure that all companies remove and limit the spread of illegal content, and that they keep their promises to stamp out this sort of abuse. Major platforms will also need to deal with abuse that falls below the criminal threshold. They will need to set and enforce clear terms and conditions on how they will tackle this content.

For the first time, companies will be held accountable for keeping their users safe on their platforms, and Ofcom will have robust powers to enforce the rules if companies do not comply.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-17/2283>

The Draft Bill referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985033/Draft_Online_Safety_Bill_Bookmarked.pdf

Social Media: Regulation

Chi Onwurah (Labour) [2284] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of requiring social media companies to report on the algorithms they use to monitor online hate speech on their platforms and any biases found within those algorithms.

Caroline Dinéage: Hate speech is completely unacceptable in an open and tolerant society. Our new laws will mean social media companies must keep promises to their users about their standards and stamp out this sort of abuse. Companies will need to take steps to mitigate the risks of harm associated with their algorithms. This will apply in the case of illegal content and, in particular, companies will need to ensure that systems for targeting content to children, such as the use of algorithms, protect them from harmful material.

Ofcom will have a range of powers at its disposal to help it assess whether companies are fulfilling their duties. The largest and most high risk companies will also be required to produce transparency reports, which will include information about the steps companies are taking to protect users. These reports may include information about the processes and tools in place to address illegal and harmful content and activity, including, where appropriate, tools to identify, flag, block or remove illegal and harmful content.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-17/2284>

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House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Israel: Palestinians

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [1126] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken to help de-escalate the situation in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op) [1127] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the US administration on the potential role of the US in helping de-escalate tensions in Israel.

James Cleverly: The UK welcomes the announcement of a ceasefire in Israel and Gaza on 20 May, which is an important step to ending the cycle of violence and loss of civilian life. The UK offers our condolences to the families of those civilians killed. The UK worked actively to urge the parties to work with mediators towards an immediate ceasefire. We fully supported Egyptian, Qatari and UN efforts to that end, working closely with the US. Hamas must now end all attacks on Israel. It is also important for Israel to facilitate rapid humanitarian access in and out of Gaza. As the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have made clear, this cycle of violence must stop, and every effort must be made to avoid loss of life.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-13/1126>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-13/1127>

Jerusalem: Religious Buildings

Lyn Brown (Labour) [662] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on the peace process of the entry into the Al-Aqsa Mosque by armed Israeli police on the 10 May 2021.

James Cleverly: The UK is clear that the violence against peaceful worshippers at the al-Aqsa mosque was unacceptable. Attacks on peaceful worshippers must stop. Respect for the historic Status Quo at the Holy Sites in Jerusalem is important at all times, especially during religious festivals such as Ramadan. We encourage all parties to maintain calm, avoid provocation and uphold the Status Quo to ensure the safety and the security of the Al Haram Al Sharif / Temple Mount and all who worship there.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/662>

Middle East: Security

Lyn Brown (Labour) [657] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effect on Middle East security and stability of the (a) continued annexation by Israel of East Jerusalem, (b) application of policies by Israel to prevent construction of homes by Palestinians in East Jerusalem, (c) application of policies by Israel to evict Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem, and (d) application of policies by Israel to promote construction and possession of homes in East Jerusalem by Jewish settlers.

James Cleverly: Our concerns about evictions of Palestinians from their homes are long-standing and well-known. I [Middle East Minister James Cleverly] spoke to the Israeli Ambassador and to the Palestinian Head of Mission in London on the 11 May, to urge them to de-escalate, restore calm and to reiterate our position on this issue. I publicised on the 8 May outlining our concern over tensions in Jerusalem linked to the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from their homes

in Sheikh Jarrah. We continue to urge Israel to cease such actions, which in all but the most exceptional cases are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all occupied territories, prohibits demolitions or forced evictions absent military necessity. The practice causes unnecessary suffering to Palestinians and is harmful to efforts to promote peace.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/657>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1391028309618839557>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Meir Kahane

Lyn Brown (Labour) [658] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the recent effect of the activities of organisations associated with the ideology of Meir Kahane on (a) incitement to violence in Israel, (b) violence against Palestinian people and their property, (c) regional security in the Middle East, and (d) the prospects for a lasting peace between two states of Israel and of Palestine.

Lyn Brown (Labour) [659] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing restrictions on the UK activities of organisations associated with the ideology of Meir Kahane.

Israel: Violence

Lyn Brown (Labour) [660] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the causes of the intercommunal violence in the Israeli city of Lod on the 11 May and 12 May 2021.

James Cleverly: Scenes of violence between Arab and Jewish Israelis in Green Line Israel are very worrying. We remain in contact with Israeli authorities, and continue to urge them to take steps to reduce further violence. The Foreign Secretary did so with Foreign Minister Ashkenazi on 11 May and 16 May.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/658>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/659>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/660>

Israel: Palestinians

Lyn Brown (Labour) [663] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what counter measures his Department has considered in the event of further Israeli annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly: We remain strongly opposed to any move to annex all or part of the West Bank. Such a move would be contrary to international law and deeply damaging to prospects for lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/663>

West Bank: Demolition

Caroline Lucas (Green) [678] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 28 April 2021 to Question 185340, West Bank: Demolition, whether the UK collects data on the (a) number and (b) cost of the UK-funded humanitarian aid structures demolished or seized by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank.

James Cleverly: The UK regularly raises the demolition of Palestinian property with the Government of Israel, including over the repeated confiscation and demolition of donor-funded assistance and structures. We work closely with key partners to

monitor any incidents. The Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all occupied territories, prohibits demolitions or forced evictions absent military necessity. 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/2021-05-12/678>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-04-21/185340>

Israeli Settlements

Caroline Lucas (Green) [679] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Government's statements criticising Israel's settlement expansion in influencing the Government of Israel to halt its expansion of settlements.

James Cleverly: We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution, including settlement expansion within the West Bank. The UK regularly raises settlement expansion with the Israeli authorities. 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. We continue to urge Israel to halt settlement expansion.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-12/679>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Gaza-Israel: UN experts welcome ceasefire, call for ICC probe

UN human rights experts ... called on all parties to the conflict in Gaza and Israel to respect a ceasefire, and for an investigation by the International Criminal Court into the attacks on civilian populations and other gross violations of human rights.

The experts pointed to the forced evictions of Palestinian families living in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan in Occupied East Jerusalem as the spark that set off a full-blown war. At least 222 people, including 63 children, were killed in Gaza and 12 people died in Israel as a result of the fighting. More than 450 buildings in the Gaza Strip were completely destroyed or damaged by missiles. Among them were six hospitals, nine healthcare centres and a water desalination plant, supplying around 250,000 Palestinians with clean drinking water, as well as a tower housing media offices such as Al Jazeera and Associated Press.

"Owing to the vast asymmetry of power, the victims of this conflict are disproportionately Palestinians in Gaza, of whom over 74,000 have been forcibly displaced and made homeless, mostly women and children," the experts said.

"The conflict has led to a new wave of unprecedented mass destruction of civilian homes and infrastructure, including electrical grids in Gaza, and indiscriminate or deliberate missile attacks on civilians and residential areas in Israel and Gaza, that violate not only international human rights standards, but amount as well to crimes under international law for which there is individual and State responsibility.

"The indiscriminate or deliberate bombardment of civilians and towers housing civilians in Gaza and Israel, as well as media organizations and refugee camps in Gaza, are war crimes that are, prima facie, not justified by the requirements of proportionality and necessity under international law. All parties who engage in such attacks must bear individual and State responsibility as appropriate.

"We urge Israel and the authorities in Gaza to restore electrical, fuel, water and food supply to Gaza, and to ensure that humanitarian aid assistance can enter into the Gaza Strip. ...

"We call on all States, especially those who support Israel or the Palestinian authorities materially, to cease the export of all military weapons that fuel this conflict and condition

all other assistance on compliance with human rights and humanitarian law.

“We urge all sides to commit to a credible process of negotiation ...

“We also call on them to address discrimination and segregation experienced by residents in the occupied territories as well as by many Palestinian citizens within Israel, including in education, housing, the freedom of movement and choice of place of residence and other domains.”

The experts urged the ICC to investigate acts by all parties which violate the Rome Statute, especially war crimes ...

“We also urge Israel, the State of Palestine and other States to investigate and prosecute these crimes according to their national law or based on the principle of universal jurisdiction, to begin the process of ending impunity,” ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27108&LangID=E>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2867>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

**** Online Safety Bill (Draft)**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-online-safety-bill>

Bill as published

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985033/Draft_Online_Safety_Bill_Bookmarked.pdf

Explanatory Notes

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985031/Explanatory_Notes_Accessible.pdf

Delegated Powers Memorandum

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985030/Delegated_Powers_Memorandum_Web_Accessible.pdf

Impact Assessment

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985283/Draft_Online_Safety_Bill_-_Impact_Assessment_Web_Accessible.pdf

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Consultations ** new or updated today

Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) (closing date 30 June 2021)

<https://evensurvey.co.uk/>

Protect Duty (closing date 2 July 2021)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protect-duty>

Curriculum for Wales Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) guidance (closing date 16 July 2021)

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-05/consultation-document-curriculum-for-wales-religion-values-and-ethics-guidance.pdf>

Curriculum for Wales Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Statutory Guidance and Code (closing date 16 July 2021)

https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-05/consultation-document-relationships-and-sexuality-education-guidance-and-code_0.pdf

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