



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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See also the Westminster Hall debate on "Covid-19: Religious and Ethnic Minority Communities" which is included in the Foreign Affairs Section below.

Scottish Parliament Oral Answer

Covid-19: Places of Worship

John Mason (SNP): As the First Minister knows, churches and other places of worship have been keen to follow the guidelines. However, they are also keen to reduce social distancing and to sing again. Can she clarify when that will happen?

The First Minister: I know that singing, particularly congregational singing, is important to faith communities. The guidance for the safe use of places of worship advises that congregational singing can take place from level 1 and that small groups, such as a choir or a band, can sing and play from level 2. At all other levels—3 and 4, which no part of the country is in at the moment—singing should be avoided because of the heightened risk of transmission.

From 19 July, we will be in a position to reduce physical distancing in all indoor spaces, including places of worship, to 1m, assuming that that is supported by the data. We will continue to engage with and support faith and belief communities as we move forward. I know that they are very keen to get all aspects of worship back to normal.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13244&i=120091&c=2335674#ScotParlOR>

Scottish Parliament Motion

Pam Gosal (Conservative) [S6M-00471] The Hard Work Carried Out by Scotland's Places of Worship – That the Parliament acknowledges and welcomes the hard work carried out by Scotland's gurdwaras, mandirs, synagogues, churches, mosques and all other places of worship; believes that the patience shown by all concerned has been commendable as they struggle without their congregation; recognises that the work

carried out by religious communities during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a lifeline to many, and believes that it has been an example and an inspiration to all.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/votes-and-motions-search/S6M-00471>

Welsh Senedd Oral Answers

Eradicating racism and building an anti-racist Wales

155 Minister for Social Justice (Jane Hutt): ... 2020 was, without a doubt, the year we confronted racism like never before, where we were forced to face up to the past and to the present state of our race relations. The impact of COVID-19 paralysed the world. Amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic were our black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The brutal murder of George Floyd sent shockwaves across the globe and sparked worldwide protests against racial injustices and inequalities, including here in Wales. These are some of the events that changed our world and they will be remembered in our history books as a wake-up call for racial justice and change. ...

158 On 24 March, we launched the draft race equality action plan for Wales, an anti-racist Wales, for consultation. I am proud that we are the first nation in the UK to call for an anti-racist country.

159 The testimony from black, Asian and minority ethnic people as we co-constructed the action plan made the scale and pervasiveness of the racism people face every day very clear. This reinforced the need for the action plan to promote an anti-racist Wales. It is not good enough to be 'non-racist'. The entrenched detrimental impacts of racism and resulting inequalities require proactive, anti-racist action.

160 Anti-racism is a call for individuals, organisations and institutions to commit to thinking actively and responding to the potential impacts of their existing structures, processes, policies and practices on black, Asian and minority ethnic people. It is time we shift the burden of tackling racism from the recipients and victims of such acts to everyone in society. And that's how we will truly achieve a Wales which is more equal, fairer and accessible for all our citizens. ...

167 Altaf Hussain (Conservative): ... Racism is not easy to spot, grasp or denounce. If it was, the task of anti-racism would be simple to identify it. People feel that it's not racist if a racist attack has not occurred, or the word 'N' or 'P' has not been uttered. We think that good people can't be racist, we think that true racism only exists in the hearts of evil people, we think that racism is about moral values, when instead it is about the survival of the system of power. The hidden nature of structural racism is difficult to hold to account. ... Structural racism is impenetrable and goes unnoticed, it is not just about personal prejudice, but collectively affects our bias. It is the kind of racism that has the power to drastically impact people's life chances. The national picture is grim, and it affects groups within the black, Asian, minority ethnic communities differently.

168 We also see the routine accusation of racism levelled against anyone who offers to endorse, to teach, to uphold the values of western civilisation. Fear of a charge of racism has led commentators, politicians and police forces all across the western world to refrain from criticising or taking action against many overtly criminal customs that have embedded themselves in our midst. Customs such as forced marriage, female circumcision, honour killing and a growing intimidation from religious groups of any one remotely critical of their faith. ...

169 I am concerned that nearly 79,000 racial hate crimes were reported in 2019, an 11 per cent increase on the previous year. ...

173 Jane Hutt: ... You talk about hate and how we have to address and tackle the intimidation and the fear that's been woven into the fabric, as you say, of our world. ... to raise awareness and understanding of hate crime and encourage reporting,

the Welsh Government invested £180,000 in the development of Hate hurts Wales, and that's a campaign to help tackle hate crime and incidents. And to do that, to develop that campaign, again, we consulted with people from ethnic minority backgrounds to actually get the right kind of communication campaign and to ensure that we had addressed it in a culturally sensitive way but that we also looked at the tone and the message for the campaign ...

197 Darren Millar (Conservative): ... It's four years ago this week that the Welsh Government adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism—a decision that I and all Members on these benches very much welcomed. I think that taking leadership in stepping forward like that, and taking hold of that definition and applying it to an organisation is a really very important thing to do. But, regrettably, there are many organisations, which are funded by the Welsh Government, which have still declined to adopt that particular working statement and definition of antisemitism, including many of our universities. Just down the road here, Cardiff University still has refused at the moment, unfortunately, to adopt that particular statement.

198 Can I ask you, Minister, what action will the Welsh Government take to proactively not just encourage people to adopt this statement, where they are funded by the Welsh Government, but to actually require them to adopt the definition, going forward? Because I think it is time now to start taking a more radical approach to deal with the sort of anti-Jewish hatred that we're seeing, unfortunately, on some of our campuses.

199 Jane Hutt: Well, certainly, that is something that we would do anyway. The Wales race equality action plan has a whole range of actions relating to education, including higher education, and looking at these issues in relation to the expectations we have of our higher education institutions clearly is part of that in terms of the importance of that definition. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/12317#A66048>

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Israel

House of Commons Private Members Bill

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

A Bill to make provision in connection with the recognition of the State of Palestine.

Sponsor: Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat)

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2942>

House of Commons Written Answers

Middle East: Peace Negotiations

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [16273] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Answer of 27 November 2020 to Question 118120, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the of the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act 2020; and whether the UK will assume one of the international seats on the governing board of the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace created by that Act.

James Cleverly: The UK government shares the objective of increasing understanding and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. In support of this, we continue to fund peacebuilding projects focused on Israel and the Occupied

Palestinian Territories. UK officials also remain in close contact with the US government regarding the International Fund. We look forward to hearing more from the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) and US Government about the International Fund's objectives and the projects it will support. Once more information is available, we will consider options for collaboration.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-15/16273>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-19/118120>

The Partnership for Peace Act, referred to above, which forms part of the US Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, can be read at section "Title VIII" of

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [15215] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what procedures are in place to ensure that financial resources intended to assist the humanitarian situation of the people in Gaza is not directed into the control of Hamas or other terrorist organisations.

James Cleverly: The FCDO has robust controls against fraud and diversion of aid. We work with implementers and partners that have strong safeguards in place, which reduces risk and ensures the maximum impact of UK aid for Palestinians. FCDO funding agreements commit partners to understand and comply with UK and international counter terrorism legislation. In Gaza, we implement robust controls to monitor spending, including enhanced due diligence assessments, annual audits, and regular field visits. All these ensure that UK aid reaches its intended beneficiaries.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-14/15215>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL859] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports (1) that the government of Israel has removed health insurance benefits from Palestinian prisoners on their release from custody, and (2) that such persons have been deported from East Jerusalem and banned from the city; and what representations they made to that government about such reports.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: We have a regular dialogue with Israel, including on the treatment of Palestinian prisoners. We remain committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to prison conditions and detention practices, including the provision of essential healthcare services upon release. In instances where there have been accusations of ill-treatment, we advocate swift, transparent investigation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-08/hl859>

West Bank: Construction

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL860] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that the government of Israel has issued a ban on the further construction of Palestinian developments near Yatta; and what assessment they have made of the impact of such a ban on any possible peace process in the region.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: We are looking into these reports. The UK and international partners will continue to call bilaterally, and in international fora, for Israel to provide a clear, transparent route to construction for Palestinians in

Area C. These issues are complex. They will only be resolved via dialogue and agreement between the parties. We will continue to encourage all parties to try and find a sustainable solution through discussion.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-08/hl860>

Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research

Report on Palestinian Textbooks

<https://owncloud.gei.de/index.php/s/FwkMw8NZgCAJgPW/download>

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Foreign Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Covid-19: Religious and Ethnic Minority Communities

col 262WH Jim Shannon (DUP): ... Many religious and belief groups have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The spread of covid-19 has exacerbated pre-existing prejudice globally. Some groups have experienced outright violence and hostility, while others have been subjected to discriminatory restrictions imposed by the state. Many more have also suffered disproportionately owing to a range of structural factors that often place religious and belief minorities in the more vulnerable segments of society that more often lack access to social justice. ...

col 263WH Minorities are at greater risk of becoming infected with coronavirus and of dying from it if they become infected. As marginalised and more vulnerable segments of society, minority groups often do not have the same level of access to medical treatment as is available to most of the population. ...

col 264WH Overt discrimination on the part of some medical practitioners has been documented in a number of states throughout the pandemic, whereby those belonging to specific religious groups have been refused medical treatment on the grounds of their faith. ...

col 265WH Even within the UK, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has warned of the disproportionate impact of coronavirus on different ethnic minority communities, and made recommendations to the UK Government to lessen those inequalities of experience. ...

Misinformation about the virus, its origins and methods of contagion, alongside entrenched distrust between many communities around the world, has led to mass discrimination against peoples on grounds of ethnicity and religion. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has warned that faith communities have suffered a tsunami of hate and xenophobia during the pandemic, and the evidence points to that—real, factual evidence—in many countries across the world. One of the most shocking ways that belief communities have been targeted has been by being falsely blamed for spreading the virus. ...

In a number of western countries, the Jewish community came under attack during the first wave after claims that their religious practices were fuelling the spread of the virus. In Iran and Turkey, there were widespread claims that covid-19 was a Jewish conspiracy, while Jewish Orthodox communities in Europe, the United States and the Middle East saw police operations against worshippers. ...

col 266WH The UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, condemned the flare-ups and existing religious intolerance in many countries, including the scapegoating of religious or belief communities, as experienced by Christians, Jews

and Muslims. ...

The UK Government have committed to counter the spread of hateful misinformation campaigns that have caused, at best, escalating inter-community tensions and, at worst, open conflict ...

Under the guise of tracking and containing coronavirus outbreaks around the world, a number of already stigmatised groups have been further marginalised from societies and seen disproportionate controls imposed on their lives. Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Jews have found that their religious beliefs put them in a different category. During the imposition of coronavirus restrictions, some religious and belief minorities who had been blamed for the spread of covid-19 had their movements and activities placed under stricter control than those of majority groups. ...

col 268WH Measures to stop the spread of covid-19 have included severely limiting religious gatherings around the world, profoundly impacting individuals' and communities' ability to manifest their religion or belief. For much of the pandemic, the right to health and freedom of religion or belief have been deemed almost mutually exclusive. Where activities have been allowed to resume, some regions have continued to restrict particular religious activities under the auspices of preventing the spread of covid-19, even when other comparable activities have been allowed to resume. ...

col 269WH As I said earlier, as a result of the pandemic, many faith and belief groups have moved their worship online. For those with internet access, that could have enabled greater engagement with religious services, particularly for those who are geographically isolated, those with disabilities or those with age issues. That rapid move to online worship in many parts of the globe has also led to growing concern that hostile state authorities might use this technology, because it is easier to get that, for increased surveillance and monitoring of minority religious communities. ...

col 271WH **Patrick Grady (SNP):** ... The debate has been an important opportunity to recognise what the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights described as the "disproportionate toll of covid-19" on marginalised and discriminated groups around the world. ... The pandemic seems to be having a dual effect, exacerbating existing inequalities, which are also exacerbating the impact of the pandemic among minority communities. ...

Throughout the world, including here at home, ethnic minority groups have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. Minority groups have experienced higher rates of infection and mortality and deeper and more difficult impacts from all the challenges that have come with the pandemic. Those include the financial impacts and the barriers caused by illness, as well as the difficult choices that those people have to make. People who are a part of a minority group and who are already living in difficult financial circumstances have to make incredibly difficult choices about whether to self-isolate or to continue to go to their places of work to make an income and support their families. That increases the risks to their families and communities. ...

col 272WH ... there is also vaccine hesitancy here at home among some minority groups, for a whole range of reasons. Faith and community leaders and faith-based organisations have an important role in helping to address those challenges and perhaps misunderstandings over vaccines. ...

Access to worship, and particularly funeral rituals, has been a challenge. ... I remember being in this room more than a year ago, when we discussed the very early stages of the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the issue of cremations and how, even in our own domestic law, we could respect religions that require the dead to be buried rather than cremated. These have been very difficult and challenging decisions ...

One of the biggest challenges the hon. Member spoke of was scapegoating and blame, when dominant groups blame minorities. ... Sadly, we also see the ugly head of antisemitism appearing on social media and elsewhere, and that always has to be challenged and called out. ...

The restrictions on worship have been particularly difficult. It has been a challenge both around the world and here at home. Funerals and farewells have not been possible in the usual way under these challenging circumstances. ...

col 273WH Worship is not something that can always be replicated online. There have been many fruits of these changes, and religious communities have been able to take part in religious services around the world. Last year, I took part in Easter services live from the Vatican from the comfort of home. But that is not the same as a community or in-person worship, and that was recognised in the judgment of Lord Braid in the Court of Session in Scotland in response to a case brought by Christian ministers ... That was an important judgment, which Governments will have to take account of if we find ourselves in similar situations in the future. ...

col 276WH **The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams):** ... [I] reaffirm the Government's unwavering commitment to freedom of religion or belief, to championing that right around the world, and to promoting respect between religious and non-religious communities. ... We believe that at least three actions can mitigate the effects of covid-19 on the most vulnerable members of society, irrespective of race, religion and ethnicity. The first is working together through multilateralism. The second is strengthening the evidence base on the effects of covid-19. The third ... is equitable access to vaccines. ...

I remain deeply concerned about the incidence of hate speech and conspiracy theories that suggest certain faiths or beliefs are to blame for the pandemic. ... the rise of antisemitism and other forms of discrimination in the wake of covid-19 is also deeply troubling...

col 277WH In November, we demonstrated our concern about the rise of another form of discrimination, antisemitism, in the wake of covid-19 in a statement to the UN General Assembly. ...

col 280WH As a champion of human rights, the UK has a duty to promote and defend equality, inclusion and respect, at home and abroad, for everyone, so I assure the House that the Government will do just that. Whatever obstacles may lie in our path, we will continue to raise awareness wherever people are persecuted for what they believe in. We will continue to stand up for the rights of minority communities around the world and we will defend the right to freedom of religion or belief for everyone everywhere. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-06-22/debates/11930C75-2851-4687-AAAF-5A38DE6D7925/Covid-19ReligiousAndEthnicMinorityCommunities>

The Equality and Human Rights Commission publication referred to above can be read at
https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/equality_and_human_rights_com_mission_how_coronavirus_has_affected_equality_and_human_rights_2020.pdf

The UN Secretary-General's statement referred to above can be read at
<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sqsm20076.doc.htm>

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief's statement referred to above can be read at
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25814&LangID=E>

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' statement referred to above can be read at
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26541&LangID=E>

The Court of Session judgement referred to above can be read at
<https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/docs/default-source/cos-general-docs/pdf-docs-for-opinions/2021csoh032.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

The UK statement to the UN referred to above is not available online.

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

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

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2875>

Charities Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2877>

**** Education (16 to 19 Academies) (Religious Character) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2946>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2878>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

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

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2900>

Online Safety Bill (Draft)

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

**** Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2942>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes in 7 days**

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

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

**** closes in 9 days**

Protect Duty (closing date 2 July 2021)

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

Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life in the EU (closing date 5 July 2021)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13068-Strategy-on-combating-antisemitism-and-fostering-Jewish-life-in-the-EU_en

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>

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438