



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

## Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

## Home Affairs

### House of Lords Oral Answers

#### Marriage and Religious Weddings

**Baroness Cox (Crossbench):** To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made towards their commitment in the *Integrated Communities Strategy* Green Paper, published on 14 March 2018, to “explore the legal and practical challenges of limited reform relating to the law on marriage and religious weddings”.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice:** My Lords, the law regulating legal marriage ceremonies developed over 150 years without systematic reform, so any changes present both legal and practical challenges. That is why the Law Commission is reviewing the law and will report later this year. A separate Nuffield Foundation study, also due to report this year, will investigate why marriage ceremonies occur outside the legal framework in England and Wales. The Government will consider both reports carefully.

**Baroness Cox:** My Lords, I remain deeply concerned, because there has been no evidence of any meaningful progress since I first raised these issues over 10 years ago. As the Muslim Women's Advisory Council told me recently, although the plight of many Muslim women in this country is well-known, “their cry for help is ignored.”

The Government have continually failed “to enshrine the rights of Muslim women who do not yet have the protection of legal marriage.”

Will the Minister at last give an assurance that legislation will be introduced, as a matter of great urgency, to ensure that religious marriages are also legally registered?

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, I am aware of the noble Baroness's work in this area and the Private Members' Bills she has brought forward in the past. The offence set out in her Private Member's Bill is one of the potential options on which we are working, but any change in practice must be based on the facts on the ground. We are doing work with the Nuffield Foundation, the Law Commission is looking at this area and we have met with Aina Khan from Register Our Marriage. While I cannot give an assurance on legislation, I can give an assurance that this has a high priority and we are looking at it with real care.

**The Lord Bishop of Gloucester:** My Lords, during the passage of the Domestic Abuse

Bill, now an Act, your Lordships discussed how best to protect migrant victims of abuse. Will the Minister assure me that any reforms, such as those being discussed here today, will safeguard migrant women and children, who are often particularly vulnerable?

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, the right reverend Prelate is right that the position of migrant women and their children, in particular, is of real concern. As we saw in the domestic abuse debates, those groups can be subject to particular intimidation and abuse. We will, therefore, consider their position in any legislation.

**Viscount Bridgeman (Conservative):** My Lords, a Channel 4 survey found that six in 10 Muslim women, who had had traditional Islamic weddings in Britain, are not legally married—a point made by the noble Baroness, Lady Cox. Of these, over a quarter—28%—are not aware that they do not have the same rights they would with a legally recognised marriage. Does the Minister not agree that this is an issue of equal rights for women? May I press him on how the Government will safeguard the rights of Muslim women and ensure that the rule of law is upheld?

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, my noble friend is right: if you are not legally married, under the law of England and Wales, you have a significantly disadvantageous position on divorce and on death. The position is simple: there is only one law in this country, the law of England and Wales. That proposition can be traced back to Jeremiah's letter to the Babylonian exiles. There is no separate system of law in this country.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss (Crossbench):** My Lords, I declare an interest as the chairman of the National Commission on Forced Marriage. I ask the Minister to bear in mind that any relaxing of the requirements of marriage might have the unintended consequence of not identifying a potential forced marriage.

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, I respectfully agree with the noble and learned Baroness that, in seeking to update marriage law, we must ensure that we do not weaken forced marriage safeguards. Indeed, we criminalised that in 2014. I know that the Law Commission is looking at these issues most carefully.

Can I just clarify my previous answer, before the Advocate-General for Scotland has a go at me? When I said “this country”, I was referring to the law of England and Wales; the law of Scotland is a separate matter.

**Lord Falconer of Thoroton (Labour):** My Lords, the 2015 review by the noble Baroness, Lady Casey, said that, as of 2015, there were up to 100,000 sharia marriages in the UK, “many of which are not recognised under UK laws and leave women without full legal rights upon divorce.”

Her review warned that this was worrying in a group with lower levels of female employment and English language. Crucially, the noble Baroness said: “The potential for women ... to find themselves in what they believe to be a binding commitment, be economically and socially dependent on their spouse, and yet have no legal marriage status, is worryingly high.”

The Minister said that this issue is a very high priority. That report was six years ago. When did it become a high priority and what have the Government done in those six years?

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, the noble and learned Lord knows that it is a high priority, because this is one of the issues that both the Law Commission and the Nuffield Foundation are looking at. We have also looked at the sharia review. As I have said, our position is that we want to make sure that people are properly protected, though I would suggest that it is as much a matter of education as it is of legislation.

**Baroness Eaton (Conservative):** My Lords, numerous independent reports, including those commissioned by the Government, have confirmed that some sharia councils embed discrimination against women, including against those women who use sharia council services on matters of marriage and divorce. Given that countless women are suffering as a result, may I press my noble friend the Minister for an assurance that we will

see government legislation sooner rather than later?

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, people may choose to abide by the interpretation and application of sharia principles if they wish to do so—that is a matter of religious freedom—provided that their actions do not conflict with the national law. But, importantly, all individuals retain the right to seek a remedy through the English courts in the event of a dispute. For these purposes, the law of England and Wales in relation to the inheritance of property will prevail. We are looking at legislation, and I will of course update the House and my noble friend as and when we reach a decision.

**Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench):** My Lords, does the Minister agree with the words of a Christian hymn that “New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth”, and that religion and religious teachings should be interpreted in the context of today’s times and the recognition of full gender equality? Does he agree that the Government’s continuing reluctance to stand up for the rights of Muslim women and girls is not only a betrayal of government responsibility but an insult to the fair name of Islam?

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, I think the theological point put to me will take an answer that is probably longer than the allotted time, but I am happy to consider it further. However, I reject the proposition that we are not concerned about the rights of Muslim women and girls. The history of the work in this area, whether on forced marriage or indeed the matters we are discussing this afternoon, would indicate the opposite.

**Lord Cormack (Conservative):** My Lords, I do not think anybody could dispute my noble friend’s personal commitment, but this is taking a very long time. Can he tell the House what line the Government will take on the Private Member’s Bill from the other place which suggests that the minimum age for marriage should be 18?

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, I think my noble friend will have seen my letter to various groups on that point. Marriage at 16 and 17 has the significant risk of people being forced into marriages and their life chances reducing. Therefore, my noble friend can take it from me that we will be looking very carefully at the Bill introduced by the Member for Bromsgrove, who now appears to be otherwise occupied.

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** My Lords, I am sure the Minister believes that there should be equality among religions in relation to divorce, and that the law should bring justice to women who are mistreated by religious husbands and religious courts. So will he ensure changes to the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, so that the court can refuse to finalise a civil divorce until an Islamic religious divorce has been obtained, if unfair pressure is being used in the religious proceedings? This would bring Islamic divorce in line with the Jewish get.

**Lord Wolfson of Tredegar:** My Lords, the premise behind the question of the noble Baroness is that the bars to effective relief are the same in Judaism and Islam, but that is not in fact the case. As I understand it, it is significantly easier for a woman to obtain a divorce in Islam than it is for a woman to facilitate or obtain a divorce in Orthodox Judaism. Therefore, the Act that the noble Baroness refers to—I believe it is Section 10A—would not have the same advantageous effect in Islamic marriages as it does in Orthodox Jewish marriages.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-06-28/debates/FC4BC1DD-43EF-44DE-AC2D-FA97E2B09A10/MarriageAndReligiousWeddings>

*The Green Paper referred to above can be read at*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/696993/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf)

Information about the Law Commission review referred to above can be read at <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/weddings/>

Information about the Nuffield Foundation study referred to above can be read at <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/wedding-not-marriage-exploring-non-legally-binding-ceremonies>

Information about the Channel 4 survey referred to above can be read at <https://www.channel4.com/press/news/new-channel-4-survey-reveals-truth-about-muslim-marriage>

The Casey Review, referred to above, can be read at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/575973/The\\_Casey\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf)

The Private Member's Bill referred to above can be read at <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2900>

## Cabinet Office, and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

**Updated guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19): Wedding and civil partnership ceremonies, receptions and celebrations**

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-wedding-and-civil-partnership-ceremonies-receptions-and-celebrations>

## Department for Education

**Guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19): changes to faith school admission arrangements**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/997804/Advice\\_on\\_varying\\_the\\_admission\\_arrangements\\_of\\_faith\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/997804/Advice_on_varying_the_admission_arrangements_of_faith_.pdf)

## Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia

**Report of the inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland by the Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia: Scotland's Islamophobia**

<https://anassarwar.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Islamophobia-public-inquiry-report-1.pdf>

TOP

## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### Israel: Palestinians

**Dan Carden (Labour)** [20494] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent estimate his Department has made of the (a) number of incidents of attacks on Palestinian healthcare facilities by Israeli forces in April and May 2021 and (b) number of investigations opened into those incidents by Israel.

**James Cleverly:** The UK welcomed 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 priority now is ensuring timely humanitarian access into and out of Gaza, including for essential health services. We are urging the Government of Israel to ensure this access is maintained. We have made clear our concern about the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza, including significant damage and destruction of civilian infrastructure including homes, schools, hospitals, and clinics.

The United Kingdom has also provided an initial £3.2 million of UK aid to UNRWA's emergency flash appeal, which launched on 19 May 2021. This appeal is helping to address the immediate humanitarian needs of vulnerable Palestinians living in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-22/20494>

### **Jerusalem: Demonstrations**

**Afzal Khan (Labour)** [20507] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of implications for his policies of the recent Israeli right-wing march through Jerusalem; and if he will make representations to the Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, on that matter.

**James Cleverly:** The UK Government strongly condemns all forms of violence and incitement to violence, including the use of racist, hateful or anti-Palestinian language and any actions that could stir up hatred and prejudice. We have a regular dialogue with both the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel in which we reiterate the need for both sides to prepare their populations for peaceful coexistence, including by promoting a more positive portrayal of one another to contribute to building the conditions needed for peace.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-22/20507>

### **Jerusalem: Palestinians**

**Afzal Khan (Labour)** [20508] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of reports of Israeli security forces attacking Palestinian protesters in Sheikh Jarrah; and what steps the Government is taking towards a peace process that is (a) based on human rights and equality and (b) rooted in international law.

**James Cleverly:** On 8 May Minister Cleverly publicly expressed 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 permanently. UK Officials at the British Embassy in Tel Aviv continue to raise the issue regularly with the Israeli Authorities.

The UK continues to engage with the Israeli government on human rights issues in the context of the occupation. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation. We urge the Israeli government to respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of peaceful, legal protestors. In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we continue to urge Israel to ensure that its investigations are transparent, swift and comprehensive. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-22/20508>

*The Minister's comment, referred to above, can be read at*  
<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1391028309618839557>



*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Palestinians: Schools**

**Steve McCabe (Labour)** [20318] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has a copy of the report on the Palestinian curriculum by the Georg Eckert Institute.

**Steve McCabe (Labour)** [20319] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the findings of the report on the Palestinian curriculum by the Georg Eckert Institute have been shared with stakeholders.

**James Cleverly:** The Georg Eckert Institute, who were commissioned by the EU to undertake a review into Palestinian textbooks published the final report on 18 June 2021. The review is publicly accessible on their website:

<http://www.gei.de/en/departments/knowledge-in-transition/analysis-of-palestinian-textbooks-paltex.html>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-22/20318>  
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-22/20319>

#### **Palestinians: Qatar**

**Kenny MacAskill (Alba)** [21342] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the establishment of a new joint Royal Air Force and Qatari air force squadron, what assessment he has made of the extent of Qatar's support to Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza.

**James Cleverly:** We have not made a recent assessment of this. All relevant considerations were taken into account when deciding to establish joint squadrons with Qatar. The long-standing friendship between the UK and Qatar is more important than ever. With shared defence and security interests, it is vital we work together for both regional and global stability.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-23/21342>

## **House of Lords Written Answers**

#### **Israel: Arms Trade**

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL1067] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made as to whether any of the weapons used by the government of Israel in its recent military activities in Gaza contain components manufactured in the UK.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** HM Government takes its export control responsibilities very seriously and operates one of the most robust arms export control regimes in the world. We consider all export applications thoroughly against a strict risk assessment framework and keep all licences under careful and continual review as standard. HM Government will not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-14/hl1067>

#### **Israel: Palestinians**

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL1066] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the statement by Defense for Children International–Palestine on 11 June that Israeli (1) forces, and (2) settlers, have killed at least 168 Palestinian children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 2013.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The UK Government strongly condemns all forms of violence and incitement to violence, including the use of racist, hateful or anti-

Palestinian language and any actions that could stir up hatred and prejudice. We are concerned by the number of Palestinians, including children, killed in the West Bank and Gaza. In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force, we urge the Government of Israel to conduct swift and transparent investigations. We welcome the efforts of Israeli authorities to address settler violence, and urge them to thoroughly investigate every instance to bring those responsible to justice and end the culture of impunity. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-14/hl1066>

*The statement referred to above can be read at*

[https://www.dci-palestine.org/israeli\\_forces\\_shoot\\_dead\\_16\\_year\\_old\\_palestinian\\_boy](https://www.dci-palestine.org/israeli_forces_shoot_dead_16_year_old_palestinian_boy)

### **Israeli Settlements: Palestinians**

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL1068] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the risks posed to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories from armed Israeli settlers.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinians. We welcome the efforts of Israeli authorities to address settler violence, and urge them to thoroughly investigate every instance to bring those responsible to justice. We continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-14/hl1068>

### **Hebron: Demolition**

**Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat)** [HL1069] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking, if any, to protect Palestinian homes in the neighbourhood adjacent to the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron from being demolished.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The UK regularly raises the issue of demolition of Palestinian property with the Government of Israel. 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/2021-06-14/hl1069>

### **Israel: Palestinians**

**Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat)** [HL1082] To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of Israel to ensure that freedom of the press is protected in (1) East Jerusalem, (2) Gaza, and (3) the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The UK is committed to the protection of media freedom around the world. We continue to reiterate the importance of a free and open press, and freedom of expression to the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-14/hl1082>

**TOP**

## 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>

TOP

## Consultations \*\* new or updated today

#### **\*\* closes tomorrow**

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

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

#### **\*\* closes in 3 days**

**Protect Duty** (closing date 2 July 2021)

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

#### **\*\* closes in 6 days**

**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](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>

TOP

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