



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

*See also Commons written answer 72582 "Hezbollah" in the Israel section below.*

### House of Commons Debate

#### **Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill: Second Reading**

**col 805 Pauline Latham (Conservative):** ... For many people I speak to, it is a shock for them to learn that child marriage is not illegal in this country already, and it happens far more often than one might think. In the last 12 months, the national charity Karma Nirvana has responded to 76 known cases of child marriage in England and Wales, with the youngest case concerning a seven-year-old girl. ...

The whole point of the Bill is to stop young people being victims, because they are. Even if there is a prosecution, we should not expect them to be criminalised, because it is not their fault; they are the victims in these situations. ...

**col 806 Robert Buckland (Conservative):** ... This legislation is part of the progressive moves that we have made over the years to stop treating the child as somehow responsible and to start understanding the child as victim. In particular, the mechanism of parental consent, which we all thought was a good safeguard, has sadly become a vehicle for abuse. ...

**Pauline Latham:** ... young people who are married are often taken out not only of education, but of society, and hidden away. They do not take a full part in society. This Bill will give those young people—it is boys as well as girls—the opportunity to take full part in society from the age of 18, because it will be their choice. ...

**col 807** We are not targeting any community in particular, but there are obviously some areas where people are more likely to have child marriages. ...

Clearly, we need to stop marriages at 16, but there is a further element to the problem. The laws apply only to registered ceremonies of marriage. Unregistered religious ceremonies in this country are not registered by age at all. In fact, the only requirement on religious marriages is that they are not forced marriages. While the Government's legislation on forced marriages ... is hugely important, it does not work for children. To prove a forced marriage, the courts must find that there is coercion or undue pressure on

the child to enter the marriage. In practice, this means that the child needs either to give evidence that will condemn their parents or state that they consented to the child marriage. Very few children of 16 have the strength to go against their parents, because they are totally under their care—I do not want to use the word “control”. ...

*col 808* A very small number of children registered their marriage legally in 2019—only 125 legal marriages involving a person under the age of 18 were registered under the parental consent exception. The number of religious child marriages is undocumented in official statistics, however, so it is likely to be higher by a huge factor. Of the cases involving child marriage reported to the Home Office-commissioned national honour-based abuse line in the year to September 2021, only four related to civil marriages. Almost 20 times as many cases involved only a religious ceremony. ...

I will turn to the specifics of how the Bill will try to achieve those aims. It sets a blanket minimum age of marriage in this country of 18, irrespective of whether the marriage is registered. There are two aspects to that. First, it removes the parental consent exception that allows children to marry at 16 or 17 in a civil ceremony with the signature of their parents or a judge. ...

*col 809* Secondly, my Bill will not just remove the parental consent exception, but cover unregistered religious marriages. This is absolutely crucial, and it is complementary to the first ambition. ...

... making arrangements for any marriage, religious or civil, involving a person under the age of 18 will automatically be categorised as a forced marriage, irrespective of any alleged consent, and therefore those who encourage or facilitate child marriage will commit an offence and can face criminal charges. ...

I will now turn to the penalties and consequences of the Bill. ...

First, changing the law in this way is intended to be a preventive measure in itself. ...

... where there is a concern for a particular child, the courts can impose a forced marriage protection order. ...

*col 810* Finally, in cases where the deterrent or the preventive action has failed, the Bill will penalise those whose conduct caused a child to enter into a marriage, whether or not the marriage is legally binding and whether or not the marriage has yet taken place. This conduct is punishable by a prison sentence of up to seven years, a fine or both. ...

... any marriage involving a child who lives in England and Wales, or who is a UK national, is covered, whether or not the actual conduct or marriage takes place in this country. ...

*col 811* It is common sense to recognise that the responsibilities and life-changing elements of a marriage flow not from the legal procedure, but rather from the traditional or ceremonial wedding. For so many cases dealt with by the charities I work with, and the forced marriage unit in the Home Office, the religious marriage is the important aspect, and the civil marriage is either non-existent or an afterthought. ...

*col 812* It is outdated to talk about people having children out of wedlock being a sin. If a girl becomes pregnant on her 16th birthday, she will not have the baby until she is almost 17—16 years and nine months—and she has to wait for only another year and three months until she can get married. In that time, she and the person that she has become pregnant by—whether that is by design or not—will, between them, be able to judge whether that is the right choice for them. ...

*col 814 Sarah Champion (Labour):* ... Last year, around a quarter of the 753 cases dealt with by the UK’s forced marriage unit involved children under the age of 18. Between 2007 and 2017, some 3,096 marriages involving children aged 16 and 17 were legally registered in England and Wales, according to the Office for National Statistics. Under the new law in the Bill, it will be absolutely clear to everyone that no child should face child marriage—whether the marriage is registered or not—and the harms it causes. ...

*col 815* Too often, we even hear about social workers who attend the religious marriages of 15-year-olds; where is their safeguarding head when they do that? ... I just do not understand that. I try, but the only logic that I can find, apart from historical reasons, is that

we are confusing sexual consent with consent to be married. ...

**col 821 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Tom Pursglove):** ... I look forward to [Pauline Latham] taking the Bill further and hope to see it complete its journey so that we can bring this law to the statute book. ...

There are two ways in which children can currently marry. First, they can have a legal ceremony at 16 or 17 with parental or judicial consent. That includes both civil and religious ceremonies such as those in the Church of England. That aspect of child marriage would be solved by raising the minimum age to 18. Secondly, children of any age can take part in marriage ceremonies that are non-legally binding, which often take place in a community or traditional setting. Those unregistered marriages will be addressed by expanding the offence of forced marriage to make it illegal to arrange for a child to enter marriage where coercion is not used. ...

**Gagan Mohindra (Conservative):** ... Does [the Minister] think that Northern Ireland and Scotland will follow suit?

**Tom Pursglove:** ... We are, of course, considering measures that relate to England and Wales. That sends out a very clear message about what our intentions are in this House and, as has been mentioned several times today, the point about the international example that we want to send out is an important one, too. ...

**Pauline Latham:** Was my hon. Friend aware that Northern Ireland is consulting on changing the law there? Obviously, he will be aware that Scotland has the same obligations as us to follow the United Nations sustainable development goals. They may end up being complete outliers and not following through, but they may also end up being dragged through with this ...

**col 822 Tom Pursglove:** ... I would like to think that the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly will want to level up their provisions in the way that we are doing today with this Bill, so that, as one United Kingdom, we have a consistent position. ... The Bill will not change the age of marriage in Scotland or Northern Ireland, as marriage is a devolved matter. Therefore, the age of marriage in Scotland will remain at 16 and in Northern Ireland it will be 16 with parental or judicial consent. Someone who arranges for a 16 or 17-year-old to get married in Scotland or Northern Ireland cannot be prosecuted for forced marriage under the law of England and Wales, unless they had used coercion to do so. That applies even if they, or the party to the marriage, lived in England and Wales. However, as explained above, if a couple travels to Scotland or Northern Ireland to marry, and either of them is 16 or 17 and has their permanent home in England or Wales, that marriage will not be legally recognised in England and Wales. It will also not be legally possible for that couple to marry in Scotland, due to existing Scottish law. ...

**col 823** I invite our friends in Scotland and Northern Ireland to review the position in their respective countries. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-19/debates/22B836A2-DCFA-4759-BD71-D978E1192F77/MarriageAndCivilPartnership\(MinimumAge\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-19/debates/22B836A2-DCFA-4759-BD71-D978E1192F77/MarriageAndCivilPartnership(MinimumAge)Bill)

## House of Commons Written Answer

### Antisemitism

**Alberto Costa (Conservative) [71369]** To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to tackle the increase in hate crimes committed against people of the Jewish faith.

**Kemi Badenoch:** Antisemitism has absolutely no place in our society, which is why we are taking a strong lead in tackling it in all its forms. We are clear that victims should be supported and the individuals who carry out these heinous attacks must

be brought to justice. The Government is providing £14 million this year for the Protective Security Grant to protect Jewish schools and community buildings and we have encouraged the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism across universities and local authorities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-08/71369>

## Home Office

### Home Secretary to ban Hamas from UK

Priti Patel has ... laid before Parliament an order to outlaw the militant Islamist terrorist movement Hamas in its entirety from the UK.

Hamas is an organisation which calls for the establishment of a Islamic Palestinian state under Sharia law and has repeatedly called for the destruction of Israel. It has long been involved in significant terrorist violence.

The organisation's military wing is already banned in the UK but following a new assessment the Home Secretary has concluded it should be proscribed in its entirety. This action will support efforts to protect the British public and the international community in the global fight against terrorism. Hamas is already listed in its entirety by the United States and European Union.

Proscription makes it a criminal offence to be a member of, or invite support for the group, with those found guilty facing up to 14 years in prison.

... Home Secretary Priti Patel will give a keynote speech on security and counter terrorism at the Heritage Foundation in Washington DC.

She will say:

"Today the UK Government has laid an order in Parliament to proscribe Hamas in its entirety - including its political wing.

Hamas has significant terrorist capability, including access to extensive and sophisticated weaponry as well as terrorist training facilities, and it has long been involved in significant terrorist violence.

Hamas commits, participates, prepares for and promotes and encourages terrorism. If we tolerate extremism, it will erode the rock of security."

Hamas' military wing was proscribed by the UK in March 2001. At the time it was the Government's assessment that there was a distinction between the political and military wings of the group. This distinction is now assessed to be artificial, with Hamas as an organisation involved in committing, participating, preparing for, and encouraging acts of terrorism. ...

The proscription order laid before Parliament on 19 November will now be debated and, subject to approval, will come into force on 26 November.

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-to-ban-hamas-from-uk>

## Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

### Schools: Hate Incidents

**Daniel McCrossan (SDLP)** [AQW 25474/17-22] To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of reported incidents of (i) racism; (ii) sectarianism; and (ii) homophobia, in schools in each of the last three years.

A central register of reported incidents of racism, sectarianism or homophobia in schools is not held by my Department or the Education Authority.

Such incidences may take the form of bullying. In this regard the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016 came into operation on 1 September 2021. The

Act provides a common definition of bullying; establishes a new duty for schools to record all incidents of bullying, their motivation, including racist, sectarian and homophobic bullying, and their outcome. Boards of Governors are also required to take responsibility for the development, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of their school's anti-bullying policies.

<http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=356833>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### Occupied Territories: Health Services

**Philippa Whitford (SNP)** [75008] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether the UK's foreign aid programs for 2021-22 will support the delivery of essential healthcare services in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

**James Cleverly:** The UK remains firmly committed to ensuring access to essential healthcare services for Palestinians. We are a longstanding supporter to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which provides core services, including healthcare to Palestinian refugees. Our future spending allocations will be set in the next Spending Review and full budgets for 2021 will be published in due course, including in our regular Statistics on International Development website and in the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office Annual Report and Accounts.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-15/75008>

#### Occupied Territories: Health Services

**Philippa Whitford (SNP)** [75009] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the UK's decision to reduce funding that supports the salaries of health and education workers in Palestine on the delivery of essential healthcare services in the occupied Palestinian territory.

**James Cleverly:** Following Official Development Assistance (ODA) prioritisation exercises undertaken in March 2021, the UK no longer provides direct funding to the Palestinian Authority to support the salaries of education workers and health professionals. The UK remains firmly committed to ensuring access to essential healthcare services for Palestinians. We are a longstanding supporter to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which provides core services, including healthcare to Palestinian refugees.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-15/75009>

#### Palestinians: Textbooks

**Andrew Gwynne (Labour)** [71292] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Answer of 25 January 2021 to Question 143050 on Palestinians: Textbooks, how many mistakes in educational material published by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA have been identified by UNRWA since 1 January 2020.

**James Cleverly:** We strongly condemn all forms of violence and incitement to violence. We accompany our support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) with stringent attention to implementation of their neutrality policy, including how they apply this to textbooks and other learning material to

ensure they reflect UN values. We understand that UNRWA has continued to review and address any education materials in breach of its policies. We remain confident that UNRWA has taken the issue seriously and has taken steps to improve their risk management system and quality assurance of educational materials.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-08/71292>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-25/143050>

### Hezbollah

**Stephen Morgan (Labour)** [72582] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment her Department has made of the threat of Hezbollah-related organised crime to (a) the UK and (b) European allies.

**James Cleverly:** We condemn Hizballah's criminal and terrorist activity. The UK proscribes Hizballah in its entirety as a terrorist organisation and has an asset freeze in place against the entire organisation. The UK works with partners around the world to coordinate action and combat organised crime groups operating across borders.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-09/72582>

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## Relevant Legislation \*\* new or updated today

### UK Parliament

#### **\*\* Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill**

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

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/43503/documents/1008>

#### **\*\* Assisted Dying Bill**

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

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/43507/documents/1006>

#### **Charities Bill**

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

#### **Education (Assemblies) Bill**

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

#### **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill**

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

#### **Israel Arms Trade (Prohibition) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3025>

#### **Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3017>

## **\*\* Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill**

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

Second Reading, House of Commons

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-19/debates/22B836A2-DCFA-4759-BD71-D978E1192F77/MarriageAndCivilPartnership\(MinimumAge\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-19/debates/22B836A2-DCFA-4759-BD71-D978E1192F77/MarriageAndCivilPartnership(MinimumAge)Bill)

## **\*\* Nationality and Borders Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3023>

Notice of amendments

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0187/amend/natbord\\_rm\\_rep\\_1122.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-02/0187/amend/natbord_rm_rep_1122.pdf)

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

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

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

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

## **Northern Ireland Assembly**

### **Organ and Tissue Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill**

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2017-2022-mandate/primary-legislation---bills-2017---2022-mandate/organ-and-tissue-donation-deemed-consent-bill/>

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## **Consultations**

\*\* new or updated today

**Labelling for Animal Welfare** (closing date 6 December 2021)

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/animal-welfare-market-interventions-and-labelling/labelling-for-animal-welfare/>

**Proposed Assisted Dying for Terminally ill Adults (Scotland) Bill** (closing date 22 December 2021)

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/proposals-for-bills/proposed-assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>

**Animal Welfare – revision of EU legislation (Food Safety)** (closing date 21 January 2022)

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12950-Animal-welfare-revision-of-EU-legislation/public-consultation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12950-Animal-welfare-revision-of-EU-legislation/public-consultation_en)

**Marriage Law (Northern Ireland)** (closing date 18 February 2022)

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations/public-consultation-marriage-law>

**Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Strategic Plan 2022-2025**

(closing date not stated)

<https://nihrc.org/news/detail/we-want-to-hear-from-you-about-our-strategic-planning-2022-2025>

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