



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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See also the Commons debate “Freedom of Religion or Belief: 40th Anniversary of UN Declaration” in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Written Answers

Meat: Ritual Slaughter

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [76653] To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what estimate his Department has made of the amount of (a) halal and (b) kosher meats exported from the UK.

Victoria Prentis: The 2018 Food Standards Agency’s survey into slaughter methods in England and Wales indicates that approximately 24% of meat from sheep slaughtered without stunning was exported to the EU. The Food Standards Agency will be undertaking a further survey in early 2022, which will provide the latest slaughter data.

There is no requirement on meat Export Health Certificates (EHCs) to stipulate if an animal was stunned or not.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-17/76653>

Muslim Council of Wales

Ruth Jones (Labour) [80463] To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, when he last met representatives of the Muslim Council of Wales.

Simon Hart: I have regular discussions with representatives from various religious groups.

The Government wholeheartedly supports the invaluable work being done by the Muslim community, and indeed all of our faith communities, who are inspired by their faith or belief.

The Government believes that people need to be able to feel strong in their religious identities and we are making sure that the voices of people of faith are heard in Government.

Increasing understanding and respect between faith communities is central to the Government’s integration agenda.

We continue to work with all of our faiths, and even more so during the pandemic. A Places of Worship Taskforce and faith-specific roundtables, including a Muslim roundtable, chaired by the Faith Minister were established so we can best support our faith communities, and listen and act on their concerns.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-23/80463>

Home Office

Islamist terrorist group Hamas banned in the UK

The Islamist terrorist group Hamas has ... become a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK in its entirety, following Parliament's approval of an Order which was laid in Parliament on Friday (19 November). This means that members of Hamas or those who invite support for the group could be jailed for up to 14 years.

The group's listing has been amended in the list of proscribed organisations to reflect this change.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/islamist-terrorist-group-hamas-banned-in-the-uk>

Scottish Government

First Minister's Chanukah Message

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=5131661123564998>

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Israel

See also the Home Office press release "Islamist terrorist group Hamas banned in the UK" included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Commons Written Answers

UN Climate Conference 2021: Access

Vicky Foxcroft (Labour) [71402] To ask the President of COP26, what steps he has taken to help prevent a recurrence of the accessibility challenges encountered by Israel's energy minister when attempting to access the Scottish Event Campus on 1 November 2021.

Alok Sharma: Inclusivity and accessibility were key priorities for COP26 and the venue was designed to facilitate that. When officials were made aware of the issue in question, which was a genuine mistake, they worked urgently with the Israeli delegation to resolve this and the UK Government apologised to Minister Elharrar. The permanent structures were fully wheelchair accessible and the venue holds gold level accessibility status. For the temporary structures a complete accessibility audit was completed and they were fully compliant. There were blue badge spaces for the conference, along with two fully accessible shuttle routes.

An accessibility support desk was on hand to help with any requests for assistance, and there were hearing loops available in conference and plenary rooms. During the second week, BSL was provided at the COP26 Presidency and UK Prime Minister press conferences, and key presidency events including the closing plenaries. Officials regularly met with the UNFCCC Disability lead to address any accessibility concerns.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-08/71402>

Palestinians: Education and Health Services

Rupa Huq (Labour) [79430] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether she has conducted an impact assessment of the potential effect of reductions in official development assistance on Palestinian (a) healthcare and (b) education.

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. We are a longstanding supporter to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which provides core services, including healthcare and education to Palestinian refugees.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-22/79430>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Debate

Freedom of Religion or Belief: 40th Anniversary of UN Declaration

col 518 **Fiona Bruce (Conservative):** ... One of the three key elements of my mandate as the Prime Minister's special envoy, as listed on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office website, is: "brings together UK efforts to promote religious tolerance abroad". ...

col 519 ... this year we have initiated a prisoners of conscience programme that enables those across the world who are imprisoned simply for what they believe to be virtually adopted by an individual MP, who commits to ongoing advocacy on their behalf. ...

I am also launching a campaign titled "End the Persecution." I invite all parliamentary colleagues to contact my office for the toolkit that will be available for MPs to use in their constituency to hold meetings and raise awareness among the wider public of the egregious infringements of FORB across the world ...

col 520 The second part of my published mandate is to "support implementing the Bishop of Truro's recommendations on Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) support for persecuted Christians around the world". ...

I should say that this is FCDO work not just for persecuted Christians, but for all those who are persecuted around the world, whatever their faith or none. ...

col 521 ... freedom of religion or belief is a key theme of the annual human rights and democracy reports and will continue to be so in future. I would like to see greater integration of FORB with the reports on other human rights, as they are so interrelated; I think for example of the right to associate, freedom of speech and other rights, such as media freedoms. ...

... earlier this year, along with Lord Ahmad, I launched the core training unit on "Religion for International Engagement", recommended for all FCDO staff and essential for FCDO officials in relevant diplomatic posts so that they can engage more informedly with religious communities in the countries in which they serve. ...

I thank the Foreign Secretary for her particularly strong statement for FORB this week when announcing the dates of a major international ministerial conference to be hosted by the UK on 5 and 6 July 2022, in London. She said: "There are still too many places around the world where practising one's religion, or having no religion, can cost you your freedom or even your life. The challenges to these freedoms continue to grow in different shapes and forms around the world. So we must act ... to help ensure that everyone, everywhere

can follow their own religion or belief.”

col 524 I am delighted to have played perhaps some small part in helping to secure the UK’s hosting of the next in-person ministerial conference in July. The Prime Minister announced the principal of the conference in the integrated review earlier this year and will draw on all the UK’s FORB work to build stronger global partnerships and agree common goals on FORB for all. It will be a major international gathering and an opportunity for us as a nation to support FORB as a right for all and to agree concrete action with partners internationally. ...

col 526 Patricia Gibson (SNP): ... Sadly, such debates to highlight the persecution of peoples based on which God they choose to believe in or which religion they choose to draw comfort from are as necessary today as they ever were. The persecution of any religious group is a fundamental breach of our basic freedoms. ...

col 527 According to this year’s Open Doors report, the total number of Christians killed for their faith rose by 60% to 4,761, of which 3,530 were in Nigeria. ... Regimes and nations that attempt to dictate to people which God they should worship are regimes and nations that have no respect for basic fundamental human rights. The crushing of a minority faith is nothing more than a means of control—insidious control, over even which God people choose to worship. This barbaric persecution is evil. ...

col 528 Edward Leigh (Conservative): ... Our country is noted for its tolerant attitude and freedom of religion, but we should be aware of focusing on the splinter in other people’s eyes and ignoring the beam in our own.

Most of us in this country—even religious people—have quite a relaxed view about our own teaching and follow a policy of “live and let live”, but for many years I have defended the rights of some religious groups that take a literal view of their teaching to be allowed space to practise their faith. I am thinking particularly of the orthodox Jewish community, some evangelical Christian communities such as the Plymouth Brethren, and observant Muslims who take a traditional view of their faith. Although we live in a tolerant and secular society, we should allow those people some space. ...

We cannot just go on taking a completely even-handed attitude to this issue, by saying that freedom of religion is incredibly important, which of course it is, and that intolerance is terrible, which it is, but ignoring the fact that in every Muslim country—I would be happy to give way if somebody can prove me wrong—even if there is not outright persecution, Christians are second-class citizens. ...

col 530 Anum Qaisar (SNP): ... I turned nine on the day the twin towers were attacked. That, for me, is the memory that I will never forget, because my life changed after that. I was always aware that as woman of colour and a practising Muslim I was a little bit different from my peers—they had church on Sunday; I had Koran lessons—but that difference was never really noted. However, the next day when I went to the school bus stop I was asked if my parents were terrorists. I was told that my skin colour was dirty. There are other memories as well. My dad was racially profiled at airports. My mosque was petrol-bombed just a couple of months after 9/11. This all happened in Scotland.

I am acutely aware of the privilege I hold in comparison with my Muslim sisters who wear the hijab, because I do not wear one. I am not identifiably Muslim. That does “protect” me, to an extent. ...

Religious intolerance is sadly becoming more prevalent in the United Kingdom, especially on social media—but I do not have time to talk about that. In a recent survey conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, more than 70% of Muslims said they had experienced some form of abuse in the past year. After Muslims, Jewish people are most targeted with religious hate crimes—19% of these crimes impact them—and the number of anti-Sikh hate crimes reported increased by 70% between 2017 and 2020. It is scary to think that religious hate crimes are under-reported and that the figures are inaccurate. There is a lack of faith — pardon the pun — in the judicial system that crimes will be

sufficiently investigated. There is no doubt that more must be done across all four nations—Scotland is no exception—to address that. ...

col 531 **Derek Thomas (Conservative):** ... We cannot measure the exact numbers of people persecuted for their faith, but reports from NGOs estimate that a third of the world's population suffers from religious persecution in some form, with Christians the most persecuted group. ...

col 532 **Patrick Grady (SNP):** ... As we have heard, not least from my hon. Friend, intolerance and sectarianism are still far too common here at home. Many of us had difficulty worshipping as we would normally during the pandemic, when worship moved online, but an important judgment was made in the Court of Session in response to a case brought by Christian ministers, including my friend Canon Tom White, the parish priest of St Mary's in Calton. It recognised the importance of being to worship in person, and I think that it will set an important precedent in years to come. ...

col 534 **Steve Baker (Conservative):** ... people sometimes seem to forget, as they live out their faith, that it is a faith. They sometimes talk about their religion as if it was a matter of fact. ... people need to remember that they have a faith, which means matters are disputable, and they get on to very grave territory—very thin ice over very hot water—if they forget that they are holding on to a faith and that the things they believe cannot be proven. ...

That brings me on to tolerance. We in the UK have in several areas started to forget what it means to be tolerant: we have started to behave as if to be tolerant is to all agree on a consensus of what goes, but that is not right. To tolerate something is to put up with it despite profoundly disagreeing with it; in other words, it is to live and let live—to agree to disagree. The things we tolerate are things that we do not like, yet we do not proceed against them by force. That is the crucial principle of a free society: it is a crucial principle that allows us to live in peace and harmony with one another that when we disagree we just tolerate; we do not proceed using force, legal or otherwise, against those with whom we disagree. ...

col 537 As a Christian, I believe in the eternal, and I believe therefore that what really matters is what is true in religion, but I accept that I cannot prove it to anyone and I am thoroughly prepared to believe that each one of us is responsible for our own salvation and it is not my problem or responsibility in the end to save the souls of others; it is their problem, much as I might be willing to evangelise. ...

col 538 **David Simmonds (Conservative):** ... I represent an extremely diverse constituency where there are people of faith—there are Muslims, Christians and Jews—who adhere to all the great world religions and many of the smaller ones, too. Navigating things like the planning system can seem enormously challenging. If you want to create a new Islamic education centre and a mosque, it can feel like the odds are against you in a way that would not be the case if you wished to open a new church, for example. We in this country need to recognise that, and when we talk about shared British values we need to ensure that we are genuinely inclusive and that everyone in the United Kingdom who adheres to those values, from whatever faith, has equality of access to our system. ...

col 542 **Fabian Hamilton (Labour):** ... the debate comes at an important time as we mark the 40th anniversary of the UN declaration on the elimination of religious intolerance, as well as Islamophobia Awareness Month. With persecution still rife across the world, it is more important than ever that we, as parliamentarians on all sides of the House, reaffirm our commitment to the values and principles of that declaration. While we certainly have our own problems at home with several forms of racism—whether it be anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or any other prejudice—freedom of religion or belief must also be at the heart of our international relations. Where we are able to empower and promote individual and collective freedoms we must do so, because it is vital to international peace and stability. However, it is just as important that we challenge those who choose to persecute others

on the basis of their belief. ...

col 544 I am proud to represent the constituency of Leeds North East, where just last week on Mitzvah Day the Jewish community came together with the Leeds Muslim community to work to prevent the exploitation of women and girls. This is just one example of the togetherness and collaboration that our city's religious communities have shown, especially throughout the past 18 months, which have been particularly difficult for so many. Whether it is Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs or Hindus, all our religious communities have shown what the kind of freedoms we enjoy in our country can lead to: peace and harmony between us all. That is what we should work towards for the rest of the world too. ...

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly): ... The UK is fiercely committed to defending the freedom of religion or belief for all, and to promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. ...

col 546 ... the UK has a duty and a drive to promote and defend equality, inclusion and respect, both at home and abroad. I assure the House that that will remain a foundation stone of UK foreign policy and that the Government do not take that duty lightly. We are and will continue to be a voice for the voiceless and defenders of the right to freedom of religion or belief for everyone, everywhere. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-11-25/debates/38AFBAC1-320A-4FD9-890A-69176A3BCE36/FreedomOfReligionOrBelief40ThAnniversaryOfUNDeclaration>

The Open Doors report referred to above can be read at

<https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/WorldWatchListreport-2021.pdf>

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>

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Turkey: Minority Groups

Jim Shannon (DUP) [76691] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department has taken in response to evidence of continued human rights abuses and persecution of Kurds, Christians, Jews, Armenians, and other minorities in Turkey.

Jim Shannon (DUP) [76692] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment she has made of the effect of the Turkish Government's policies on political pluralism and freedom of association on religious or belief minority groups in that country.

Wendy Morton: We strongly support all minority groups in Turkey and encourage the Turkish authorities to safeguard their welfare and respect their human rights, in line with provisions in the Turkish constitution that protect the rights of religious minorities. We participated in the 2020 UN Universal Periodic Review of Turkey and pressed particularly for removing obstacles to freedom of expression, including freedom of religion or belief. We will continue to engage with Turkey on these important issues and monitor the treatment of minorities, as well as government moves to close down the People's Democratic Party (HDP).

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-17/76691>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-17/76692>

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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/1054>

Assisted Dying Bill

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

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>

**** 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_1129v2.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

**** closes in 8 days**

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

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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