



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Debate

#### **Online Safety Bill: Second Reading, House of Commons**

*col 94* **The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nadine Dorries):**

... School bullying used to stop at the school gate. Today, it accompanies a child home, on their mobile phone, and is lurking in the bedroom waiting when they switch on their computer. ... One extremely worrying figure from 2020 showed that 80% of 12 to 15-year-olds had at least one potentially harmful online experience in the previous year.

We also see this every time a footballer steps on to the pitch, only to be subjected to horrific racism online ... a woman on social media ... faces a daily barrage of toxic abuse. ...

*col 95* All this behaviour is either illegal or, almost without exception, explicitly banned in a platform's terms and conditions. Commercially, it has to be. If a platform stated openly that it allowed such content on its sites, which advertisers, its financial lifeblood, would knowingly endorse and advertise on it? ... Who would openly use or allow their children to use sites that state that they allow illegal and harmful activity? ... Yet we have almost come to accept this kind of toxic behaviour and abuse as part and parcel of online life. We have factored online abuse and harm into our daily way of life, but it should not and does not have to be this way. ...

For the first time, platforms will be required under law to protect children and young people from all sorts of harm, from the most abhorrent child abuse to cyber-bullying and pornography. Tech companies will be expected to use every possible tool to do so, including introducing age-assurance technologies, and they will face severe consequences if they fail in the most fundamental of requirements to protect children. ...

*col 96* The second part of the Bill makes sure that platforms design their services to prevent them from being abused by criminals. When illegal content does slip through the net, such as child sex abuse and terrorist content, they will need to have effective systems and processes in place to quickly identify it and remove it from their sites. ... The third part seeks to force the largest social media platforms to enforce their own bans on racism, misogyny, antisemitism, pile-ons and all sorts of other unacceptable behaviour that they claim not to allow but that ruins life in practice. In other words, we are just asking the largest platforms to simply do what they say they will do ... If platforms fail in any of those basic

responsibilities, Ofcom will be empowered to pursue a range of actions against them, depending on the situation, and, if necessary, to bring down the full weight of the law upon them. ...

*col 97* We know that tech companies can act very quickly when they want to. Last year, when an investigation revealed that Pornhub allowed child sexual exploitation and abuse imagery to be uploaded to its platform, Mastercard and Visa blocked the use of their cards on the site. Lo and behold, threatened with the prospect of losing a huge chunk of its profit, Pornhub suddenly removed nearly 10 million child sexual exploitation videos from its site overnight. These companies have the tools but, unfortunately, as they have shown time and again, they need to be forced to use them. ...

*col 100* I can give countless examples from the past two months alone of tech not taking online harm and abuse seriously, wilfully promoting harmful algorithms or putting profit before people. ... The BBC reported 100 images to Telegram as pornography, but 96 were still accessible a month later. ...

Twitter took six days to suspend the account of rapper Wiley after his disgusting two-day antisemitic rant. Just last week, the Centre for Countering Digital Hate said that it had reported 253 accounts to Instagram as part of an investigation into misogynistic abuse on the platform, but almost 90% remained active a month later. ...

*col 101 Christian Wakeford (Labour):* ... The Government have set out the priority offences in schedule 7 to the Bill, but legal harms have clearly not been specified. Given the torrent of racist, antisemitic and misogynistic abuse that grows every single day, does my hon. Friend know why the Bill has not been made more cohesive with a list of core legal harms, allowing for emerging threats to be dealt with in secondary legislation? ...

**Lucy Powell (Labour Co-op):** ... I fear the Government's current solution to the balance between free speech and regulation will please no one and takes us down an unhelpful rabbit hole. Some believe the Bill will stifle free speech, with platforms over-zealously taking down legitimate political and other views. In response, the Government have put in what they consider to be protections for freedom of speech and have committed to setting out an exhaustive list of "legal but harmful" content, thus relying almost entirely on a "take down content" approach, which many will still see as Government overreach.

On the other hand, those who want harmful outcomes addressed through stronger regulation are left arguing over a yet-to-be-published list of Government-determined harmful content. This content-driven approach moves us in the wrong direction away from the "duty of care" principles the Bill is supposed to enshrine. The real solution is a systems approach based on outcomes, which would not only solve the free speech question, but make the Bill overall much stronger. ...

*col 105* ... social media companies are now so powerful and pervasive that regulating them is long overdue. Everyone agrees that the Bill should reduce harm to children and prevent illegal activity online, yet there are serious loopholes ... Most of all, the focus on individual content rather than business models, outcomes and algorithms will leave too many grey areas and black spots, and will not satisfy either side in the free speech debate. ...

*col 107 Margaret Hodge (Labour):* ... The human cost of abuse on the internet is unquantifiable—from self-harm to suicide, grooming to child abuse, and racism to misogyny. A space we thought gave the unheard a legitimate voice has become a space where too many feel forced to stay offline. As a Jewish female politician online, I have seen my identities perversely tied together to discredit my character and therefore silence my voice. I am regularly accused of being a "Zionist hag", a "paedophile" and a "Nazi". But this is not just about politicians. We all remember the tsunami of racism following the Euros, and we know women are targeted more online than men. Social media firms will not tackle this because their business model encourages harmful content. Nasty content attracts more traffic; more traffic brings more advertising revenue; and more revenue means bigger profits. ...

I cherish anonymity for whistleblowers and domestic violence victims—it is vital—but when it is used as a cloak to harm others, it should be challenged. The Government's halfway measure allows users to choose to block anonymous posts by verifying their own identity. That ignores police advice not to block abusive accounts, as those accounts help to identify genuine threats to individuals, and it ignores the danger of giving platforms the power to verify identities. ...

**col 114 Andrew Percy (Conservative):** ... These platforms have been warned over the years to take action yet have failed to do so. Their online platforms have remained a safe space for racism, holocaust denial, homophobia, conspiracy theories and general bullying. ... as the Minister knows from my meetings with him alongside the Antisemitism Policy Trust, there are ways in which I think the Bill can be improved.

First, on small, high-harm platforms, I pay tribute to the Antisemitism Policy Trust, which has been leading the charge. ... everybody knows Facebook, Twitter and YouTube but few people are aware of a lot of the smaller platforms such as BitChute, 8kun—previously 8chan—or Minds. These small platforms are a haven for white supremacists, incels, conspiracy theorists and antisemites; it is where they gather, converse and share and spew their hate.

An example of that is a post from the so-called anti-Jewish meme repository on the platform Gab which showed a picture of goblins, in this instance the usual grotesque representation of those age-old Jewish physical stereotypes, alongside the phrase, “Are you ready to die in another Jewish war, Goyim?” That is the sort of stuff that is on these small platforms, and it is not rare; we see it all over. Indeed, many of these small platforms exist purely to spew such hate, but at present, despite the many measures in the Bill that I support, these sites will be sifted by Ofcom into two major categories based on their size and functionality. ...

The Government have not so far been enthusiastic about risk being a determinant factor for fear that too many of the small platforms would be drawn into scope. That is why I hope that as this Bill progresses the Minister will consider a small amendment to enable Ofcom to have powers to draw the small but high-harm platforms, based on its assessments—the so-called super-complaints that we have heard about or other means—into the category 1 status. That would add a regulatory oversight and burden on those platforms. This is all about putting pressure on them—requiring them to go through more hurdles to frustrate their business model of hate, and making it as uncomfortable as possible for them. ...

**col 115** We in the all-party group against antisemitism found examples in Alexa and other voice-activated search platforms where the responses that come back are deeply offensive and racist. I understand that the relationship with the user in entering into a search is different from having an account with a particular social media platform, but these search engines are providing access to all sorts of grotesque racist and misogynistic content and I hope we can look at that as the Bill progresses. ...

**col 130 Alex Davies-Jones (Labour):** ... The Bill in its current draft has a huge focus on the tools for removing and moderating harmful content, rather than ensuring that design features are in place to make services systematically safer for all of us. ...

We are all eager to hear what exact harms platforms will have to take steps to address and mitigate. Will it be self-harm? Will it perhaps be content promoting eating disorders, racism, homophobia, antisemitism and misogyny? One of the key problems with the Bill is the failure to make sure that the definitions of “legal but harmful” content are laid out within it. Will the Minister therefore commit to amending the Bill to address this and to allow for proper scrutiny? ...

**col 131** Another major omission from the Bill in as currently drafted is its rather arbitrary categorisation of platforms based on size versus harm. ... the categorisation system as it currently stands will completely fail to address some of the most extreme harms on the

internet. Thanks to the fantastic work of organisations such as Hope not Hate and the Antisemitism Policy Trust, we know that smaller platforms such as 4chan and BitChute have significant numbers of users who are highly motivated to promote extremely dangerous content. ... Rather than an arbitrary size cut-off, the regulator must instead use risk levels to determine which category a platform should fall into so that harmful and dangerous content does not slip through the net. ...

**col 132 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Philp):** ... It is very important to emphasise that, regardless of size, all platforms in the scope of the Bill are covered if there are risks to children. ...

I will give some thought to how the question of small but high-risk platforms can be covered. However, all platforms, regardless of size, are in scope with regard to content that is illegal and to content that is harmful to children. ...

**col 133** The Bill also enshrines, for the first time, free speech ... but it goes beyond that. As well as enshrining free speech in clause 19, it gives special protection, in clauses 15 and 16, for content of journalistic and democratic importance. ... we intend to table a Government amendment ... to make sure that journalistic content cannot be removed until a proper right of appeal has taken place. ...

**col 135** When it comes to the provisions on “legal but harmful”, neither the Government nor Parliament are saying that those things have to be taken down. We are not censoring in that sense. We are not compelling social media firms to remove content. All we are saying is that they must do a risk assessment, have transparent terms and conditions, and apply those terms and conditions consistently. We are not compelling, we are not censoring; we are just asking for transparency and accountability ...

This Bill is groundbreaking. It will protect our citizens, it will protect our children ... and I commend it to the House. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-04-19/debates/F88B42D3-BFC4-4612-B166-8D2C15FA3E4E/OnlineSafetyBill>

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## Foreign Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Religious Freedom

**Kirsten Oswald (SNP) [151159]** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether arrangements have been made for delegates to the global summit to promote freedom of religion or belief to hear directly from minority groups experiencing violence and oppression in countries across the globe.

**Vicky Ford:** The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in July 2022 will drive forward international efforts on this agenda and demonstrate the UK's leading role in supporting freedom and openness. This conference will allow us to use our global influence to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally. Preparations for the conference are ongoing, including planning for participants to hear directly from those suffering restrictions to freedom of religion or belief.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-31/151159>

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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>

#### **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>

#### **\*\* Online Safety Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

Second Reading, House of Commons

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-04-19/debates/F88B42D3-BFC4-4612-B166-8D2C15FA3E4E/OnlineSafetyBill>

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

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

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## Consultations \*\* new or updated today

#### **Independent Review of Social Cohesion and Resilience** (closing date 2 June 2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-review-of-social-cohesion-and-resilience-call-for-evidence/independent-review-of-social-cohesion-and-resilience-call-for-evidence>

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