



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Lords Debate

#### The Queen's Speech

*col 372* **Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Labour):** ... The higher education Bill will consider minimum qualification requirements for student finance and a cap on student numbers. Both are vehemently opposed by universities. As well as its huge adverse impact on social mobility, which expert bodies such as the IFS have pointed to, it is coupled with a worse still carryover—the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill. Your Lordships may remember that my party in the other place voted against this Bill at Second Reading, such was our concern about its enabling of hate speech and the potential financial implications for universities. ...

*col 379* **The Lord Bishop of London:** ... Last year, I launched a Health Inequalities Action Group, bringing together parliamentarians, interfaith leaders, health specialists and civil society leaders to explore how we can improve health outcomes across London and the social circumstances that surround them. In 2022, we hosted a series of community consultations to capture the different experiences. Through this work, we have found that faith groups, if sustainably supported, can continue to improve the work of statutory and civil society organisations to action complex health and social interventions. ...

*col 380* I have said before that the vision we should be striving for is one of mutual flourishing, generosity and abundance. This is also known as the Jewish and biblical concept of shalom, which can be summarised as experiencing wholeness or a state of being without gaps. Together with those working for a more whole and healthy society, I would like this Government to act in line with the NHS long-term plan, which focuses on prevention and early intervention to reduce healthcare costs and the burden of disease. I would like this Government to adopt models and practices that embody efforts to design a more holistic health service—this is in effect aimed at achieving shalom—not just the absence of disease. It is an approach that needs to happen if we are to take the levelling-up agenda seriously. ...

*col 381* **Lord McColl of Dulwich (Conservative):** ... We have a long tradition of Christian service and the service given by many of different faiths or no faith. The Church has a very

important role in setting an example in these areas. After all, it is from our Christian foundations that this country's hospitals and schools were set up in the first place and its welfare system developed. ...

**col 386 Lord Lingfield (Conservative):** ... I have had meetings with governing bodies of some first-class and well-established schools that would like, in principle, to become academies. They tend to be church schools, voluntary aided or controlled, and selective schools, many of them with long histories that pre-date the introduction of state education. ... They usually have a distinctive ethos; for some, this is a particular faith. ... Their governors, while often attracted in principle to academy status, have expressed to me two major anxieties that often prevent them taking their interest further.

First, the present regulations for converter academies are too restrictive and often require the appointment of governors by outside bodies, unwelcome to a particular school, or the alteration of governance traditions that are centuries old. There should be much more accommodation in the current arrangements to take this into account. ...

Secondly, these schools have often been used to a special kind of independence within the system and would not wish to be thrust by law ... into a multi-academy trust with other schools, although they often welcome loose federations with others in their localities. Some governing bodies greatly fear the loss of their autonomy ... Often, these voluntary schools are among the country's best performing schools and there should be as few impediments as possible to them becoming stand-alone academies. ...

**col 423 Baroness Falkner of Margravine (Crossbench):** ... I too share the Government's overall concern that free speech is being increasingly impinged upon in our academic institutions. ... I am also aware that ... academics in different disciplines self-censor or avoid challenges in areas where their work might not conform with the existing consensus. I broadly support the principles of the Bill but note that we have heard concerns in the other place that the Bill might go too far in its permissiveness of what I think has been described as "hate speech".

I want to briefly clarify that point. Hate speech does not have legal meaning, although it is generally understood to be forms of expression that incite violence, hatred or discrimination against other groups or people. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights delineates the law on freedom of expression. Whether or not hate speech falls outside the protections of Article 10 and is unlawful will depend on the context of what is said and when. I would not be overly concerned about measures to protect academic freedom and free speech on the basis that it will be a licence for other types of unwanted behaviour, such as harassment, as those protections will continue to be extant under the Equality Act 2010. As ever, I hope that detailed scrutiny will lead us to a balance, and I accept that competing rights will be engaged in this Bill, and so we shall have to look at it very carefully. On that note, I have to say that I broadly welcome these two pieces of legislation. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-05-17/debates/E2167CDE-3057-4733-856A-BA0F9A05B83F/Queen'SSpeech>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answer

**Shireen Abu Akleh**

**Afzal Khan (Labour) [1324]** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth

and Development Affairs, what assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the killing of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

**Amanda Milling:** On 11 May, I publicly expressed my sadness upon hearing news of the tragic death of veteran Palestinian Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh and called for a thorough investigation. The Foreign Secretary also made this clear in a statement on 12 May. The UK Ambassador to Israel has reiterated the importance of an investigation with the Israeli authorities. The safety of journalists across the globe is vital and they must be protected when carrying out their critical work.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-05-12/1324>

*The statements referred to above can be read at*

<https://twitter.com/amandamilling/status/1524396468370653184>

*and*

<https://twitter.com/trussliz/status/1524648916012220417>

## House of Lords Oral Answers

### Shireen Abu Aqla

The following Answer to an Urgent Question was given in the House of Commons on Monday 16 May.

“The United Kingdom Government were shocked to hear of the very sad death of the respected and renowned journalist Shireen Abu Aqla while working in the West Bank. On 11 May, the Foreign Secretary and UK Ministers made clear our concern, and we have called for a thorough investigation into the events. On 13 May, in company with the other members of the United Nations Security Council, we strongly condemned the killing and stressed the importance of an immediate, thorough, transparent, fair and impartial investigation. We also stressed the need to ensure accountability.

The work of journalists across the globe is vital and they must be protected to carry out their work and defend media freedom. We were also deeply distressed by the scenes at the funeral of Shireen Abu Aqla on Friday. Her death was a tragedy and those mourning must be treated with respect and dignity. The situation on the ground makes clear the need to make progress towards a peaceful two-state solution, and the UK stands ready to support.”

**Lord Collins of Highbury (Labour):** My Lords, the killing of Shireen Abu Aqla was not only an outrageous act but an attack on the freedom of the media and the independence of journalists working around the world. Her killing was rightly condemned by world leaders, the UN and civil society. The recent violence at Shireen’s funeral was similarly indefensible. While I note that Vicky Ford in the other place yesterday confirmed support for the international investigation, she did not indicate whether representations had been made to her counterparts in the Israeli Government to encourage them to support such an inquiry. Can the Minister answer this, and say whether further representations have been made to the Israeli Government on the subsequent violence following the funeral?

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon):** My Lords, I am sure that I speak for everyone, irrespective of where they are on the issues in the Middle East and the situation between Israel and the Palestinians, when I express my shock at the killing of a very renowned journalist, Shireen Abu Aqla. She worked over many years with great diligence and great conviction, and—speaking as someone who leads on the importance of media freedom around the world, which I know is close to the noble Lord’s heart as well—she did exactly what we know many journalists do in conflict zones: operated in reporting news with great courage and conviction. She has tragically paid the

ultimate price of her life. The subsequent scenes we saw during the funeral shocked many of us. Witnessing that unfolding on television screens was clearly something that everyone found extremely shocking. I can confirm that of course we are engaged. Our ambassador has engaged directly with the Israeli authorities, as has our consul general in Jerusalem. We have continued to press for a thorough investigation into the events that took place.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed (Liberal Democrat):** With regards to the funeral, Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, of the Roman Catholic Church, was reported as saying this: “The Israel Police’s invasion and disproportionate use of force—attacking mourners, striking them with batons, using smoke grenades, shooting rubber bullets, frightening the hospital patients—is a severe violation of international norms and regulations, including the fundamental human right of freedom of religion.”

The Vatican has said that the 1993 agreement on the protection of the fundamental human right of freedom of religion and belief has been brutally violated. The Minister is well regarded on this subject, and he has spoken very regularly in this House on the importance of UK leadership on the protection of the fundamental human right of freedom of religion and belief. What direct representations have Ministers from the UK Government made to their counterparts in the Israeli Government?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My actions are fully investigated. What unfolded Lords, the noble Lord is right that freedom of religion or belief is a key priority for the United Kingdom Government. ... the response is being investigated—and it is right that those on our screens was, irrespective of where you stand on the issues that divide people in the Holy Land, something that no one deserved. The sanctity of life is important, and the funeral of someone who has tragically been killed—or any funeral—has to be respected for the dignity of the deceased. We will continue, as we have done, to call on the Israeli authorities to open an investigation. I know that, equally, the Palestinian Authority is looking at an investigation. We believe that it needs to be impartial so that it can establish the facts on the ground, and we will continue to work constructively with both sides.

**Lord Polak (Conservative):** My Lords, the bravery and courage of journalists reporting from war zones and caught up in the crossfire knows no bounds, and my sympathy and prayers are with the family of Shireen Abu Aqla. However, does my noble friend the Minister share my sympathies and prayers for the families of Oren Ben Yiftah, father of six; Yonatan Havakuk, father of five; and Boaz Gol, father of six? They were all hacked to death with axes and knives by Palestinian terrorists on 5 May.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** ... while we ultimately seek and hope for peace and security for all, I condemn any shocking or tragic death and express our solidarity with those who suffer the tragedy of such actions. This underlines the importance of achieving a resolution to the conflict. It is important that we strive to find peace in the Holy Land.

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** My Lords, it is sad but not surprising that the general opinion piles in to find that Israel is guilty before any investigation is carried out. Will the Minister encourage the Palestinians to hand over the relevant evidence—I believe it is a bullet, and we hope that it will be the right one—for investigation? Will he also encourage the Palestinians to stop their “pay for slay” policy whereby the families of assassins who are in prison are given salaries? That would be one way to cut down the amount of tragic bloodshed in that area.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My Lords, on the tragic killing of Shireen Abu Aqla, it is important that we have made the UK’s position clear. Indeed, on 13 May, with other members of the UN Security Council, we not only condemned the killing but stressed the importance of an “immediate, thorough, transparent, fair and impartial investigation” and the need to ensure accountability. In this respect, anyone who has evidence in support of such an investigation needs to bring that forward. It is

also important to say that no one who commits these acts achieves any goal towards the important path of peace. What we need at this time is reflection on the tragedy that continues to engulf all communities across Israel and the Palestinian territories but, equally, to ensure that the structures and justice systems act to bring justice for those who suffer as a consequence of these tragic acts.

**Lord Austin of Dudley (Non-affiliated):** My Lords, the scenes at the funeral were terrible but it is completely wrong for people to attribute all the blame to Israel for this tragedy, when it occurred during a gun battle launched by terrorists trying to prevent the arrest of people responsible for the sort of attacks we have just heard about, and when one of those gunmen was heard saying that he had shot a soldier when in fact no soldiers were hit. This might explain why the Palestinian Authority has refused to allow the bullet that we just heard about to be examined and has refused to hold a joint investigation.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My Lords, that is why we have been very clear in saying that the investigation has to take place. It needs to be impartial and to ensure that all evidence is included. As I have said—I say it time and again as someone who has visited Israel, not just officially but with my family, and who has also visited the Palestinian territories—there is much that those communities find in common. It is important that we now find minds that can bring this conflict to a resolution. Ultimately, for every life lost there is a family, whether Israeli or Palestinian, that has to endure the loss. This tragedy has to come to an end. ...

**Baroness Ludford (Liberal Democrat):** My Lords, the Minister did not quite answer the question of whether he thought it feasible and valuable to have a joint investigation. The bullet is clearly an essential piece of evidence. He talks about an impartial investigation; does he believe it should be a joint one?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My Lords, that has certainly been put forward, and the Israeli side has called for a joint investigation. As I have said, one hopes that both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli authorities can come to an agreement to ensure that the evidence necessary to any investigation is fully provided, so that we have that impartial investigation. One hopes that that bridge can be crossed, so that there can be agreement on the investigation. ...

**Baroness Warsi (Conservative):** ... Shireen was an American Palestinian Catholic member of the press. We have seen just from the interventions in this House that opinion is divided as to how she was murdered. In those circumstances, does my noble friend agree that the only way to make sure that we get to the bottom of who killed—assassinated—Shireen is to have an independent investigation, independent of those accused of being involved?

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** My Lords, of course, as I have said already, the United Kingdom Government have been very clear that what is needed is an investigation that is “immediate, thorough, transparent, fair and impartial”. It is important for all involved in that investigation to come together. Ultimately, we want to see those who were responsible for the killing of Shireen to be brought to justice.

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-05-17/debates/8CCE172E-8B49-43DD-992C-26C5433CD5/ShireenAbuAqla>

*The Security Council statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/sc14891.doc.htm>

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

### UK Parliament

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

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

#### **Online Safety Bill**

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

#### **Schools Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156>

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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>

#### **Public Participation at the Scottish Parliament** (closing date 30 June 2022)

<https://yourviews.parliament.scot/cppp/participation-2022/>

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