



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### Northern Ireland Executive Ministerial Statement

#### Marriage Law

**Conor Murphy (Minister of Finance):** Members will be aware that earlier this year, the Department of Finance completed its public consultation on possible amendments to marriage law. The consultation considered legislative change with regard to two aspects of the current law on marriage and civil partnership—(i) the inclusion in the marriage law of belief marriage (marriage ceremonies for people who subscribe to non-religious belief systems such as humanism); and (ii) increasing the minimum age for marriage and civil partnership from the present 16 to 18. ...

The main findings of the consultation are as follows.

With regard to belief marriage, a majority of online respondents (approximately 70%) and all written respondents who addressed the subject were supportive that Government amend the marriage law to put belief marriage on an equal footing with religious marriage. There was little opposition to the proposal in itself. None of the three churches that responded, for example, raised any objection. While naturally noting their own preference for religious marriage, all agreed with the proposal on equality grounds.

Consultee support for increasing the minimum age for marriage and civil partnership to 18 was close to unanimous with 97% of online respondents supportive. Few favoured keeping things as they are and there was only modest enthusiasm for compromise measures such as alternative or additional forms of consent (e.g. replacing parental consent with the consent of an authoritative body such as a court or requiring the consent both of parents and an authoritative body). ...

My Department will now begin work that will allow for the preparation of legislation to enable belief marriage and raise the minimum age for marriage to 18. It will only be possible to bring forward and enact this legislation once there is a functioning Assembly and Executive.

**To read the full statement see**

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/Marriage%20Law%20Consultation%20-%20Ministerial%20Statement.pdf>

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## House of Commons Debate

### Iran's Nuclear Programme

*col 491 Robert Jenrick (Conservative):* ... That this House expresses grave concern at the imminent prospect of a nuclear armed Iran; calls on the Government in its ongoing negotiations in respect of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement to seek to extend the sunset clauses, enact a stricter monitoring regime, retain terrorist proscriptions, and expand its scope to include Iran's other destabilising activities in the region. ...

I am on the record as having been very sceptical of the original 2015 deal, believing it to be too limited in scope to prevent Iran's malign activities and far too weak in enforcement to prevent a nuclear Iran, should Iran choose that path. ...

*col 492 Gareth Davies (Conservative):* ... He mentions that Iran has developed uranium to 60% purity. Is he aware of any country on Earth that has enriched to that level for peaceful purposes?

**Robert Jenrick:** No, and I do not think anyone would believe that that is Iran's ultimate intent. The latest intelligence, for example, showing that bunkers have been constructed underground in which to hold some of that material, makes clear what the ultimate intent of Iran is on this issue. ...

*col 494* A glaring weakness of the JCPOA was that it did nothing to address Iran's wider activities throughout the world. ... Iran was and remains the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism ... The regime's commitment to exporting the Islamic revolution has been underwritten by an active embrace of violence since it first came to power in 1979. In recent weeks, Istanbul has been the setting for an extraordinary Iranian terror plot. Thanks to the close co-operation between the Israeli and the Turkish security services, an Iranian terror cell attempting to kidnap and kill Israeli tourists—innocent civilians—was thwarted. In one incident, several Israeli tourists visiting a market had to be intercepted before they returned to their hotel room, where their would-be assassins were reportedly waiting for their return. ...

The Iranian threat is very clear and present here at home. In 2019, it was revealed that British intelligence services had identified a Hezbollah cell stockpiling 3 tonnes of highly explosive ammonium nitrate in residential north-west London for use in a terror attack ... Behind all these ... sits the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran's premier agent for terrorism. The organisation funds, trains and provides the ideological underpinning for many of the world's terror organisations, from Hamas to Hezbollah to the Houthis. Reports from the previous round of negotiation that the Biden Administration was considering delisting the IRGC from its foreign terror list have been worrying, to say the least. Quite simply, it would be a grave miscalculation and a great dishonour if our Government were to support any such action. It would make a mockery of the efforts that we have made in recent years to proscribe Hamas and Hezbollah if we signed up to a deal that legitimises the very organisation that funds Hamas and Hezbollah. ...

*col 495* In March ... 70 Democrats and Republicans in Congress wrote to the National Security Adviser, Jake Sullivan, to demand that the new deal signed with Iran must include ... retention of the IRGC proscription—I would like the UK Government to proscribe it as well—and a toughening of the monitoring regime, with an extension in scope to include Iran's other destabilising activities such as its ballistic missile programme. ... Why would we do something that is of such a short-term benefit, if any? In doing so, we weaken our relationships with some of our oldest friends and key partners, whether that be the state of Israel, the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia or others ...

*col 496 Jeremy Corbyn (Independent):* ... We are coming up to the non-proliferation

treaty review conference this August ... Iran was a member of the non-proliferation treaty. Successive meetings that I have been to on the non-proliferation treaty have always concluded with the hope that there would be the declaration of a middle east weapons of mass destruction-free zone, which would give the opportunity for Israel and Iran to be included in the negotiations for a non-nuclear future for the middle east. While I fully appreciate that Iran clearly has developed centrifuges and enriched uranium almost to weapons-grade, two other countries in the region either have nuclear weapons or could. One is Israel, which clearly does have nuclear weapons, and the other is Saudi Arabia ...  
*col 498* There is added urgency because of the situation in Palestine, the occupation of the west bank and the siege of Gaza. There is also the war in Yemen ...

*col 499* **David Jones (Conservative):** ... In its report of 1 June, the Institute for Science and International Security concluded: "Iran's breakout timeline is now at zero. It has enough 60 percent enriched uranium or highly enriched uranium (HEU) to be assured it could fashion a nuclear explosive. If Iran wanted to further enrich its 60 percent HEU up to weapon-grade HEU, or 90 percent, it could do so within a few weeks with only a few of its advanced centrifuge cascades." ...

It is made all the more worrying by Iran's increasingly erratic and aggressive stance in the region and, indeed, the wider world. ... Its proxies are engaged in fomenting conflict in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. ... Iran is certainly exporting terrorism not just throughout the region, but across the world. ...

*col 501* **Steve McCabe (Labour):** ... As the LFI argues in its recent pamphlet on the subject, the UK needs to develop realistic strategies to address the nuclear threat and the other Iranian issues. Iran's ballistic missile programme is the biggest in the middle east and makes it the first country to develop a missile with a 2,000 km range without having first developed nuclear capability. It is also the only country that routinely threatens to wipe another nation off the face of the map—the destruction of the state of Israel is the official policy of Iran's leaders. ...

*col 502* ... as well as threatening Israel's existence, Iran is responsible for waging war, terrorism and violence—mostly through its proxies—in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and the Palestinian territories. The UK has rightly banned some of those proxies, but not all their front organisations. The Government should do more and look at proscribing Hezbollah and Hamas. ...

*col 504* **Andrew Murrison (Conservative):** ... Although we should not be complacent, we should not be worried about a no-deal scenario. The Iranian regime is struggling to rid itself of Israeli infiltration, which is preventing it from advancing its nuclear apparatus and security state. We all remember the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh last year. Most recently Hossein Taeb, IRGC head of intelligence, has been dismissed, and on 22 May IRGC colonel Sayyad Khodaei was shot dead outside his home. ...

*col 506* **Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... I am unashamedly a friend of Israel. I was a member of the Northern Ireland Friends of Israel group when I served in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and I am a member of the Friends of Israel here in this great House. I also have a close working relationship with the Iranian Government in exile ...

Iran has a blatant disregard for democracy, freedom, and liberty, and for truth and honesty—it is as simple as that. ...

The May 2022 IAEA report, perhaps the most detailed and damning since its November 2011 report, made it clear that the regime had not been entirely open and honourable ...

*col 507* The risk is at its highest ever. The axis of evil of Russia, China, North Korea and Iran threaten the very stability of the world. It is time, as others have said, to refer the matter to the UN, which is the body responsible, and it is time for a collective response. The world must unite against Iran. It is, as has been said, a rogue state that must be controlled. It cannot be allowed to roam free. Iran has disregard for human decency, as we all know. ...

The dire situation could not be clearer, so our corresponding action must be just as clear, firm and immediate. ... Strongly worded statements are not enough. It is vital for the future of the planet and this world that nuclear arms are kept away from unstable nations and Governments such as those in Iran who have proven themselves not to be honest and open when it comes to their aims. Iran seeks the wanton destruction of Israel and other parts of the western world. ...

*col 509 Gareth Davies:* ... A nuclear Iran is a clear threat to peace and the world order. Iran has made clear its views on Israel's mere existence and, obviously, a direct nuclear attack on Israel would become a real possibility. A nuclear-armed Iran would also be emboldened to increase its support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. ... For any agreement, you need trust, and lately Iran's actions seem to demonstrate a lack of interest in building trust. It says that its nuclear ambitions and intentions are entirely for civilian purposes... So why has it enriched to 60%? Why has it turned off 27 surveillance cameras? Why has it developed uranium metal, which has no civilian use but lots of use in developing nuclear weapons? All the while ... it has developed a significant ballistic missile programme, and it has had the gall to call for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to be declassified as a terrorist organisation. Those are not the actions of a state willing to engage in peace talks or one that seeks to build trust with anyone. ...

*col 510 Matthew Offord (Conservative):* ... It is almost unthinkable that the world's greatest sponsor of state terrorism could be on the nuclear threshold, but that is the reality. Two of today's speakers have mentioned Ahmadinejad saying that he would like to wipe Israel off the map, which could be taken in two ways. I think he was being provocative while at the same time speaking politically. The issue of the JCPOA and a nuclear Iran is not about Israel and Iran. It is not even about Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. It is about the Twelver Muslims, who have a different ideology and view of the world, which they would like to see adopted by other Muslim countries, and they would certainly like to see it in the western hemisphere as well. ...

*col 513 Bob Blackman (Conservative):* ... The revolutionary guard corps openly supports Hezbollah by providing financial assistance, weapons, ammunition and military training. Hezbollah has reportedly acquired 150,000 missiles—I repeat: 150,000 missiles, targeted at Israel alone—and Iran continues to attempt deliveries of weaponry to the proxy to threaten others in the region. ...

The al-Ashtar Brigades is another IRGC-directed terror group. It has claimed responsibility for—rather, admitted to—several terror attacks in Bahrain and often calls for attacks against the British Government on social media. ... the British Government and the British people are under direct threat from the IRGC.

These terror groups are rightfully already proscribed by Britain, but we do not hold the organisation that funds and directs them to the same account. ...

*col 516 Kirsty Blackman (SNP):* ... The joint comprehensive plan of action was never ideal, but it was better than no deal and we need to recognise that it was a major diplomatic achievement. ...

We agree with the calls for the UK to use our place to press the regime—and to press all regimes that have issues with human rights or are committing human rights abuses, whether that is Iran, Saudi, Russia or any of the countries committing human rights abuses against their citizens or citizens of other countries. ...

*col 517 Bambos Charalambous (Labour):* ... The JCPOA was a landmark agreement. ... We remain hopeful that a way forward can be found ... It is absolutely right that the UK Government engage with those negotiations. We continue to believe that the JCPOA framework remains the best option to limit Iran's nuclear programme, based on restoring Iranian compliance in exchange for sanctions relief. ...

In the short term, pressure must be applied on Tehran to reverse its enrichment programme so that it is within the limits of the initial agreement. Iran must also refrain from

further steps that would reduce the possibility of a return to that agreement. In the longer term ... aims should be not just to restore the JCPOA, but to address the long-standing issues and other aspects of the Iranian Government's actions that cause serious concern. ...

*col 518* These issues need to be addressed, and the Labour Party believes it is imperative to move them up the international agenda. We are seriously concerned about the threats that Iran has made against Israel. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak referred to Iran's stated desire to see Israel's destruction. ...

*col 519* I therefore ask the Government to continue to pursue every possible avenue diplomatically to help to promote and restore the nuclear deal with Iran. ... We must continue to support our international partners, including Israel, by holding the regime to account, and we must ensure that the wider issues ... are not left unaddressed by the UK and our international allies. ...

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Vicky Ford):** ... Iran's nuclear programme has never been more advanced than it is today, and our objective remains to ensure that the country never acquires a nuclear weapon. The escalation of its nuclear activities is threatening regional and international peace and security, and undermining the global non-proliferation system. ...

*col 520* I agree that the JCPOA is not perfect, but it does represent a pathway for constraining Iran's nuclear programme. A restored JCPOA would provide a foundation for international diplomatic efforts to ensure that Iran's nuclear programme remained peaceful in the long-term. ...

Iran must stop its destabilising behaviour. We believe it is important to encourage Iran to take a more constructive approach to its relationship with its neighbours. The UK has long made clear our concern about Iran's reckless destabilising activity in the region, including the political, financial and military support that it gives to militants and proscribed terrorist groups, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, to militias in Iraq and to the Houthis in Yemen.

Iran's support for these groups and activities risks the security and prosperity in the region. They pose a direct threat to the UK and to our interests as well as to the safety of our allies. ...

We will continue our work with allies and partners to hold Iran to account for breaches of UN security resolutions. That includes supporting enforcement of UN prohibitions on the proliferation of weapons to non-state actors in the region, including to Hezbollah and to the Houthis in Yemen. ...

*col 521* Let me conclude by saying that it is in no one's interest to see a nuclear-armed Iran. The UK is firm in its commitment to the security and prosperity of our allies in the region, and to working with the international community to hold Iran to account for its destabilising activity. We urge, and will continue to urge, Iran to cease its nuclear escalation and to conclude the deal currently on the table to restore the JCPOA while that is still possible. If that does not happen, we will work with our international partners to consider all options. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-06-30/debates/16020625-AB7A-4552-ADC1-0FA36C0444D3/Iran'SNuclearProgramme>

*The pamphlet referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.lfi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Iran-A-Darkening-Picture-at-Home-and-Abroad.pdf>

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

### UK Parliament

#### **Bill of Rights Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227>

#### **Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186>

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

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

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

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

Notice of amendments

[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0121/amend/onlinesafety\\_rm\\_rep\\_0704.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0121/amend/onlinesafety_rm_rep_0704.pdf)

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

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217>

#### **Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188>

#### **\*\* Schools Bill**

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

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/47125/documents/2085>

### Scottish Parliament

#### **\*\* Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill**

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

Evidence Session, Equalities, Human Rights, and Civil Justice Committee

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/what-was-said-in-parliament/EHRCJ-28-06-2022?meeting=13858&iob=125660>

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## Consultations \*\* new or updated today

#### **Public Participation at the Scottish Parliament (closing date 22 July 2022)**

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

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