



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Lords Oral Answers

Prisons: Chaplaincy Service

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench): To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the working of the prison chaplaincy service; and in particular, the extent to which representatives of all faiths are included in the discussions of the Prison and Probation Service's Chaplaincy Council. ...

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Bellamy): My Lords, since 1996 the chaplaincy council has helped deliver prison chaplaincy based on multiple faiths and beliefs. However, it no longer reflects the breadth of faith and belief of those in prison or on probation. We therefore propose to replace the chaplaincy council with a chaplaincy faith and belief forum representing all faiths. We will consult widely on that proposal and related reforms, including the smaller faiths in particular.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon: ... until three years ago the chaplaincy council was working well. Why replace something when it is not broken? A prison chaplaincy council representing the six major faiths has not met for some three years, with Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists being excluded from policy discussions and discriminated against in grant support, visiting and educational hours and career opportunities. Widening the prison chaplaincy council will worsen that situation. Why are our concerns and complaints consistently ignored by those charged with the promotion of inclusion and diversity, who feel that all they need to do to fulfil their remit is write pronouns after their names?

Lord Bellamy: ... In the Government's view, the chaplaincy council needs to be brought up to date to make sure that all faiths are properly represented and, in particular, to make sure that the faith and belief advisers, who assist the Prison Service, particularly in the appointment of chaplains, and who are very often on the council, are remunerated and appointed transparently and consistently so that there is no question of any difference of treatment in that regard. ...

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Labour): ... The Minister has again used the words

“all faiths”. I wonder if he will include humanists in the consultation, because there are many who would welcome chaplaincy from a humanist understanding as well.

Lord Bellamy: The answer to that, my Lords, is yes.

Lord Cormack (Conservative): My Lords, bearing in mind that the whole purpose of prison is rehabilitation and that chaplains have a very important role to play in that context, can my noble and learned friend tell me how many prison chaplains of each faith there are at the moment, and whether he is satisfied that this number is sufficient to accomplish the very important task before them?

Lord Bellamy: My Lords, to the best of my knowledge, there are approximately 1,200 prison chaplains overall and approximately 20 chaplains of the Sikh faith. I do not have other figures in front of me. Sikhs make up less than 1% of the prison population, which is extremely admirable, and the number of Sikh chaplains in particular is well out of proportion to the number of Sikhs who are unfortunately in prison.

Lord Sahota (Labour): My Lords, when deciding on the policy of the Prison and Probation Service with regards to its pastoral service, the views of all faiths should be taken into account. I was surprised to learn from my friend, the noble Lord, Lord Singh of Wimbledon, that this is sometimes not the case. I sincerely hope that the Government take these views into account and look into this matter urgently. ...

Lord Bellamy: I can give the noble Lord the assurance that he seeks.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (Non-affiliated): My Lords, is the Minister aware that some 60% of our managing prison chaplains are now Muslims, while only some 17% of our prisoners share that faith? What do the Government think this imbalance may be doing for the promotion of Islamism in our prisons, and what do they feel they should do about it?

Lord Bellamy: My Lords, I have no reason to suppose that the Muslim chaplains in the chaplaincy service, where they are appointed, are doing anything other than providing multifaith belief and support to the whole of that prison population.

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: ... As the work of multifaith community chaplaincy and indeed the Welcome Directory continues to be developed to support those leaving prison, can the Minister say what discussions there have been, if any, regarding possible funding support from HMG?

Lord Bellamy: As the right reverend Prelate pointed out, the Government already support and fund the Welcome Directory. That resource enables prisoners to seek help to resettle safely in the community. Each probation region may commission and fund local services, including community chaplaincy services. The Government will keep these funding arrangements under review, in view of the importance of the rehabilitation of prisoners in the community.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Labour): ... we need an evidence-led, trauma-informed approach to rehabilitation. Prisons now contend with a revolving door of staff, with constant recruitment failing to fill the vacancies across the estate. This is a crisis made by the Government, because of cuts and a lack of investment in the justice system. What will the Minister do to retain experienced staff and recruit new staff?

Lord Bellamy: My Lords, the Government can point with some pride to a fall in reoffending rates in recent years and an extensive programme of recruitment for not only prison staff but the probation service. In terms of the discussion today, which is about chaplaincy, we look forward to greater involvement of chaplains in sentencing planning, resettlement planning and the steps taken when prisoners are released to ensure that their release is successful and that they do not reoffend.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat): ... Prison chaplaincy provides a very valuable pastoral and counselling service for all prisoners and staff in the Prison Service. Chaplains are forbidden from proselytising and have a general responsibility to help all who seek help and advice. However, given that according to the 2021 census 37% of the population have no faith at all, has the time not now come for non-religious pastoral carers

to be included in the new chaplaincy, faith and belief forum?

Lord Bellamy: My Lords, it is the Government's intention to see that that happens.

Lord Farmer (Conservative): My Lords, my noble friend the Minister has touched on prisons and probation, but where does the role of chaplaincy sit within the "One HMPPS" programme for achieving greater alignment between prison and probation and a whole-sentence approach? There has in the past been limited joint working between probation staff and prison chaplains, even at key points in the sentence, such as when planning for release. Also, prison chaplaincy sits within HMPPS and community chaplaincy is carried out by the voluntary sector, independent of government.

Lord Bellamy: My Lords, the Government seek greater alignment between prison and probation. The chief probation officer will be a member of the new council of faith and belief. A new pilot will see prison chaplains attending approved premises to which released prisoners go and there will be further collaborative work with the Community Chaplaincy Association.

To read the question and answer session in full see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-01-10/debates/2E4D3BD4-3EDB-49B5-ACB1-20415D4C9FFC/PrisonsChaplaincyService>

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Holocaust

Scottish Parliament Motion

Alexander Stewart (Conservative) [S6M-07428] Holocaust Memorial Day 2023 and Online Campaigns – That the Parliament acknowledges Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), which is held on 27 January each year and that, for 2023, the theme is Ordinary People; understands that each year local HMD activities take place across the UK, bringing people together from all backgrounds to learn more about the Holocaust, Nazi persecution and the genocides that followed; believes that HMD also provides a meaningful opportunity for people to consider how to make society a better place today, free from hatred, prejudice and discrimination; notes that, in the past years, the #WeRemember social media campaign has raised awareness of the Holocaust and its modern-day relevance by encouraging individuals to post on social media with the hashtag "#WeRemember"; further notes that for this coming Holocaust Memorial Day in 2023, with the help of the World Jewish Congress, organisations such as the University of Glasgow Jewish society are bringing the #WeRemember campaign to Scotland under the umbrella of the #ScotlandRemembers social media campaign; understands that this week-long online campaign from 20 to 27 January 2023 will conclude with an in-person memorial in Edinburgh, and that, in an unprecedented move, for the first time, students from all major universities in Scotland will come together to remember and call for action to tackle what it sees as the ongoing rise of antisemitism and racism, and commends all these aforementioned organisations as well as the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, which is streaming the UK Online Commemoration for HMD 2023 on its website on 26 January 2023, at 7.00 pm, and the Holocaust Educational Trust for what it considers its tireless endeavours toward the education for all on the Holocaust and the importance of peace and equality for all.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-07428>

United Nations

United Nations Marks 2023 International Day to Commemorate Holocaust Victims under Theme ‘Home and Belonging’

On Friday, 27 January, the United Nations will observe the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust under the theme “Home and Belonging”. ...

Victims of the Holocaust had their homes, their nationalities, and sense of belonging ripped from them by the Nazis and their racist collaborators. The violence of exclusion began with disinformation and hate speech that sought to normalize systemic injustice, discrimination and marginalization, and ended with genocidal killing. The theme, “Home and Belonging”, highlights the multidimensional human needs of victims of atrocity crimes and the dangers of hate speech, antisemitism, Holocaust distortion and denial, and prejudice. ...

The ceremony can be watched on United Nations WebTV, the United Nations YouTube channel, or the Twitter account of United Nations WebTV. Guests are invited to [register](#) and receive links and updates about the ceremony or follow the event on social media with the hashtag #HolocaustRemembrance. ...

United Nations Information Centres will host Holocaust remembrance and education activities with their local partners ...

The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme was established by General Assembly resolution 60/7 in 2005. Its multifaceted programme encompasses a variety of online and print educational resources, panel discussions, exhibitions, a film series, and the annual worldwide observance of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, held on 27 January. For more information about the programme please visit: <https://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/about-us>. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/note6547.doc.htm>

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Israel

British Consulate General Jerusalem

Middle East Minister visits the Occupied Palestinian Territories

On his first visit to the region since his appointment as the UK Minister for the Middle East, Lord Ahmad will visit the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) to understand the challenges facing Palestinians, reinforcing the importance of the bilateral relationship and see first-hand the impact of UK development and humanitarian support in the West Bank. He will engage with the Palestinian Authority leadership, the Palestinian public, faith leaders, young people and meet with inspiring Palestinians working to create thriving and profitable businesses.

During his visit Lord Ahmad will meet with key humanitarian partners and announce £3.7m of additional funding to UNRWA to support food assistance to 1.2 million of the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees in Gaza.

During his time in the Old City of Jerusalem, Lord Ahmad will tour Haram Al Sharif and meet with Sheikh Azzam Al Khatib Al Tamimi, Director General of Islamic Endowments in Jerusalem. He will also visit the Christian and Jewish Quarters of the city where he will reiterate the importance of the Status Quo and Jordanian custodianship over the Holy Sites in Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad will also visit Hebron to hear about the impact of Israeli settler violence on

Palestinian residents and visit an UNRWA school where he will meet with students and hear how UK aid supports the education of Palestinian boys and girls. ...

In Masafer Yatta in the South Hebron Hills, Lord Ahmad will see the impact of UK aid on vulnerable Palestinians living in Area C, who are facing the threat of eviction and demolition of their homes. He will reiterate the UK's opposition to evictions and demolitions, which are illegal under international law in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

During the Minister's engagements with representatives from the United Nations, Lord Ahmad will discuss the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the OPTs and reiterate the UK's longstanding support to UNRWA ...

The Minister's own interest in theology and work to promote freedom of religion and belief will be channelled into informal discussions with religious leaders and key thinkers to discuss the contribution of interfaith dialogue towards conflict resolution. ...

Ahead of his visit, Lord Ahmad said: "My visit comes at a difficult but important time for the Palestinian people, and I want to re-emphasise UK support to the Palestinian people and our unwavering commitment to a negotiated two-state solution as the only means of ending this conflict.

"Visits to various parts of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem will allow me to witness first-hand the challenges facing Palestinians as well as to see the impact of UK funding to some of the most vulnerable.

"I look forward to discussing UK-Palestinian relations with a wide range of interlocutors over the coming days."

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/middle-east-minister-visits-the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

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Other Relevant Information

Antisemitism Policy Trust

Russia's use of Antisemitic Propaganda in the War in Ukraine

<https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/6657-Antisem-Russia-Report.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>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325>

**** Online Safety Bill**

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

Notice of amendments

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0209/amend/onlinesafety_rm_rep_0110.pdf

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill

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

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163>

Schools Bill

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

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/charities-regulation-and-administration-scotland-bill>

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

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

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Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 9 days**

Assisted dying/assisted suicide (closing date 20 January 2023)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/81/health-and-social-care-committee/news/174845/mps-launch-new-inquiry-on-assisted-dyingassisted-suicide/>

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