



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

Antisemitism

Dean Russell (Conservative) [130089] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle anti-Semitism.

Lee Rowley: Antisemitism has absolutely no place in our society, which is why we are taking a strong, cross Government approach to tackling it in all its forms. The UK became the first country to adopt the Definition of Antisemitism; we support the work of Lord Mann, the Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism, and we provide funding to the Holocaust Education Trust. I would also refer my Hon. Friend to the answer to Question UIN [117512](#) which gives further detail on the steps taken to tackle this issue.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-23/130089>

Death: Statistics

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [133706] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish excess deaths data broken down by religious group of the deceased in the last three years.

Jeremy Quin: The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. ...

... Religion is not recorded at death registration; therefore, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) do not regularly publish data for any mortality measure broken down by religious group. A publication has previously been produced using the linked data for deaths involving COVID-19 by religious group in England¹, but the method for calculating excess deaths has not been applied.

It may be possible to produce excess deaths by religious group using linked mortality to Census data. This is complex analysis, which we are unable to provide at this time and we do not currently have plans to undertake in our research program.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/deaths-involving-covid-19-by-religious-group-in-england/24-january-2020-to-28-february-2021>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-26/133706>

Senedd Oral Answer

Universities: IHRA working definition of antisemitism

Darren Millar (Conservative): Trefnydd, last Friday was Holocaust Memorial Day, and it was my honour to be able to welcome to the Senedd last week, along with many other colleagues, Hedi Argent, who of course is a Holocaust survivor, to the Senedd, who shared her experiences with us. As you may well be aware, the Combat Antisemitism Movement's 2022 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition report has been published, and it looked at 1,116 entities, including 39 countries and 464 regional states and local government bodies. Here in the UK, it recorded that there were 150 reports of antisemitic incidents affecting Jewish students, academics, university staff and student bodies across the UK during 2021 and 2022. So, it's very alarming, Trefnydd, that there are universities here in Wales that are yet to adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism. Minister, I'd be very grateful for a statement from the Welsh Government Minister responsible for education, to make it absolutely and abundantly clear that no university or other place of education in Wales should receive any further Welsh Government funding, any taxpayer funding whatsoever, unless they adopt the IHRA working definition. Will you confirm that a statement will be forthcoming?

Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd (Lesley Griffiths):

Thank you. I'm sure many of us commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day. I was very fortunate to have the Minister for Social Justice in my constituency, and we attended an event together. On the point you raised, the Welsh Government has adopted the definition of IHRA as a working definition, as you're aware, and it is a matter for each university to then adopt it. I know that the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language has had those discussions with them.

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/13191#C480723>

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Holocaust

See the Senedd oral answer "Universities: IHRA working definition of antisemitism" which is included in the Home Affairs section above.

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Israel

House of Commons Oral Answers

Palestinian Territories: Israeli Settlements

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent) [903371] Whether it remains the Government's policy that Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories are illegal.

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (James Cleverly): Yes.

Jeremy Corbyn: If the Israeli Government settlements are illegal, why did the UK

Government vote against referring them to the International Court of Justice at the United Nations? What sanctions are being applied to Israel for supplying arms and trading with illegally produced settlement products? If those settlements are completely illegal, as the Government say, why are we having anything to do with them at all? Why did we change our stance at the United Nations?

James Cleverly: The United Kingdom opposes unilateral resolutions that damage efforts to advance dialogue and therefore damage the prospects of a two-state solution. The UK's position on settlements has been clear, consistent and unambiguous. We continue to work towards a negotiated two-state solution. We strongly believe that that is in the best interests of Israelis and Palestinians. That will remain our policy.

Richard Bacon (Conservative): Having recently had the opportunity to visit the west bank with the International Development Committee, I was able to understand just how much worse conditions have become in the past 10 years or so for Palestinian families wishing to see one another within the west bank. What steps have the Government taken to impress upon the Israeli Government how poorly we regard moves to balkanise the west bank itself? What further can be done?

James Cleverly: We enjoy a close and professional working relationship with the Government of Israel, which allows us to raise areas of co-ordination and co-operation but also issues where we disagree. Our position on the west bank and settlements is clear, and we have highlighted the importance for not just the Palestinian people but for Israel and Israelis of maintaining a credible route to a viable Palestinian state. We strongly believe that is in Israel's best interests, and therefore we do speak out—we have done in the past, and we will do again—if decisions are made that we believe jeopardise the credible option of a viable two-state solution. ...

Bambos Charalambous (Labour): We are deeply concerned by the escalating violence in Israel and the west bank, and Labour joins the international community in condemning the recent attacks and deploring the deaths of civilians. In response to my letter about forced evictions and demolitions in Masafer Yatta, the Minister for the Middle East said that the Government were "clear that in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions and forced evictions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law... and harmful to efforts to promote peace."

Can the Secretary of State tell us what steps are being taken to ensure that Israel stops the eviction of Palestinians from their homes and what efforts are being made to support negotiations to keep alive the prospect of a two-state solution, with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestine?

James Cleverly: I had a telephone conversation with the recently appointed Israeli Foreign Minister, in which I congratulated him on his appointment and also made it clear that the UK's long-standing position on peace in the region remains as passionate now as it ever was. We always encourage calm responses by the Israeli Government and restraint and professionalism while they pursue their own legitimate attempts at self-defence. We look at the deaths that are happening in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which of course are deeply distressing. We will continue working directly with the Israeli Government, partners in the region and other interested countries around the world to pursue peace and de-escalation and to try to make real our collective desire for a peaceful, sustainable two-state solution.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-31/debates/09536AD9-ACE4-4BC3-B4FE-17F81041A114/PalestinianTerritoriesIsraeliSettlements>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Andrew Selous (Conservative) [903389] We all condemn the violence that has led to the

death of so many Palestinians and Israelis this month. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that the UK still regards Israeli settlements as a flagrant breach of international law, as specified in Security Council resolution 2334, which I understand was largely written by the United Kingdom? If that remains the case, what is the penalty for those continued breaches?

James Cleverly: I can assure my hon. Friend that our position on the illegality of those settlements remains unchanged. We raise the matter with Israel. As I have said, in my initial call with the Israeli Foreign Minister, I raised our desire for a meaningful, peaceful two-state solution. We will always speak out when we believe that something is happening with which we disagree, but we will always seek to provide a route to reconciliation, to dialogue, to de-escalation and ultimately to the delivery of that peaceful, sustainable two-state solution.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk//commons/2023-01-31/debates/E233DB4F-124F-43CB-AC55-A40E9E924FBF/TopicalQuestions#contribution-2C9F05EC-96C3-4BE4-A6A9-33A9D561C7FD>

The resolution referred to above can be read at

<https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Gary Sambrook (Conservative) [903395] Last month, the Prime Minister heralded the international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace as an exciting new way of empowering peaceful co-existence. Does the Foreign Secretary share my passionate support for this groundbreaking initiative? Will he commit the UK to being at the heart of the effort to prepare for the much sought-after two-state solution as we deepen the Abraham accords?

James Cleverly: The Abraham accords were groundbreaking. The UK supported them at the time, and we continue to support them. We will explore opportunities to make the most of that normalisation of relationships, particularly at the moment, when there is a real desire to de-escalate the current tensions that we are seeing in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I can assure my hon. Friend that I personally and the ministerial team put a huge amount of effort into ensuring that.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk//commons/2023-01-31/debates/E233DB4F-124F-43CB-AC55-A40E9E924FBF/TopicalQuestions#contribution-50150706-E953-4CF9-8398-70EFB0BE24CB>

Topical Questions: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Scott Benton (Conservative): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the glorification of martyrdom within Palestinian society remains a key obstacle to any future lasting peace agreements? That includes the payment of salaries to convicted terrorists by the Palestinian Authority, with higher salaries going to those who have killed more Israelis.

James Cleverly: If there is to be any chance of a sustainable peace in Israel and the OPTs, it is incredibly important that people recognise the importance of tolerance and of working and living together. When I first became a Minister in the Department, I raised with the then Palestinian Education Minister the situation relating to textbooks being used in Palestinian schools. We will continue to work to encourage greater understanding and co-operation, rather than allowing this divisive narrative to be imposed on young Palestinian children.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk//commons/2023-01-31/debates/E233DB4F-124F-43CB-AC55-A40E9E924FBF/TopicalQuestions#contribution-ADF8C159-3F06-489C-A062-92D1A2483A0A>

House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Civil Society and Human Rights

Kim Johnson (Labour) [130008] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign,

Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support Palestinian (a) civil society and (b) human rights organisations in (i) Israel and (ii) the Palestinian Territories.

David Rutley: Civil society organisations play an important role in upholding human rights and democracy, and they must be able to operate freely in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). Officials at the British Embassy in Tel Aviv continue to call upon the Government of Israel to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and organisations and to allow them to freely operate in Israel and OPTs. The Minister for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, reinforced this message during his visit to Israel and the OPTs on 10-13 January.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-23/130008>

The following four questions all received the same answer

Palestinians: West Bank

Kim Johnson (Labour) [130004] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the evictions of Palestinians in Masafer Yatta.

Kim Johnson (Labour) [130005] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the legality of the evictions of Palestinians from Masafer Yatta.

West Bank: Farms

Kim Johnson (Labour) [130006] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on the provision of military support by that country to (a) outposts and (b) farms built in the West Bank by settlers without formal Government authorisation.

Israeli Settlements

Kim Johnson (Labour) [130007] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department assesses the legality of (a) official and (b) unofficial Israeli settlements in the Palestinian Territories under international law.

David Rutley: The UK urges the Government of Israel to permanently end its settlement expansion and settlement activity in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We are also clear that Israeli outposts in the West Bank are illegal under international humanitarian law and should be removed entirely. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation. The Minister for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon reinforced this message during his visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 12 and 13 January.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-23/130004>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-23/130005>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-23/130006>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-23/130007>

Department for International Trade

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Israel

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1132359/israel-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2023-02-01.pdf

Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Pakistan: Religious Freedom

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL4818] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to encourage the government of Pakistan (1) to protect the Jewish community in that country, and (2) to support freedom of worship and belief.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Protecting freedom of religion or belief for minority communities is central to the UK Government's human rights engagement in Pakistan. We regularly raise the treatment of minority communities at a senior level with the Government of Pakistan. On 30 January, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for South Asia and Minister responsible for Human Rights, discussed the need to protect religious minorities with Pakistan's Minister for Human Rights, Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada. Lord Ahmad also discussed the importance of promoting respect for all religions during his meeting with Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on 14 December 2022.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-01-17/hl4818>

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>

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

Equality and Human Rights Commission Statutory Review (closing date 1 March 2023)

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-statutory-review>

Draft guidance: charities use of social media (closing date 14 March 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-guidance-charities-use-of-social-media>

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