



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Religious Freedom: Curriculum

Alexander Stafford (Conservative) [139258] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department has provided guidance to schools on the teaching of freedom of religion and belief.

Nick Gibb: As part of religious education, schools without a religious character are expected to adopt a pluralistic approach when it comes to the teaching of different faiths. Non-faith maintained schools must follow the locally agreed syllabus which, whilst being broadly Christian in nature, must take account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain. Non-faith academies are free to design their own syllabus, but it must meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.

Since 2014, all schools have been required to actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs. The Department has published guidance on promoting fundamental British values as part of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, to which maintained schools have obligations.

Schools are free to cover a full range of issues, ideas and materials, including where they are challenging or contentious. This must be balanced against their obligations to ensure political balance and promote respect and tolerance between people of different faiths and beliefs. The Department has published guidance for schools on political impartiality, to help them to understand their responsibilities in this area, including the importance of introducing pupils to a diverse range of views during their time at school:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/political-impartiality-in-schools>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-02-03/139258>

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Israel

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Joint statement on announcement of further settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

The UK, US, France, Germany and Italy (the Quint) have expressed dismay at the Israeli government's decision to expand settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

"We – the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany and Italy, the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, and the Secretary of State of the United States – are deeply troubled by the Israeli government's announcement that it is advancing nearly 10,000 settlement units, and intends to begin a process to normalize nine outposts that were previously deemed illegal under Israeli law. We strongly oppose these unilateral actions which will only serve to exacerbate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians and undermine efforts to achieve a negotiated two-state solution.

"We continue to support a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East, which must be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties. Israelis and Palestinians both deserve to live in peace, with equal measures of freedom, security, and prosperity. We reaffirm our commitment to helping Israelis and Palestinians fulfill the vision of an Israel fully integrated into the Middle East living alongside a sovereign, viable Palestinian state. We continue to closely monitor developments on the ground which impact the viability of the two-state solution and stability in the region at large."

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-announcement-of-further-settlements-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN experts say Israel should be held accountable for acts of 'domicide'

The international community must take action to stop systematic and deliberate housing demolition and sealing, arbitrary displacement and forced evictions of Palestinian people in the occupied West Bank, UN experts said today.

In the month of January 2023 alone, Israeli authorities reportedly demolished 132 Palestinian structures across 38 communities in the occupied West Bank, including 34 residential and 15 donor-funded structures. This figure represents a 135 percent increase, compared to the same period in 2022, and includes five punitive demolitions.

"The systematic demolition of Palestinian homes, erection of illegal Israeli settlements and systematic denial of building permits for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank amounts to "domicide".

The experts reiterated their concern over the situation in Masafer Yatta, where over 1,100 Palestinian residents remain at imminent risk of forced eviction, arbitrary displacement and demolitions of their homes, livelihood, water and sanitation structures. In November 2022, Israeli authorities demolished a donor-funded school in Isfey al Fauqa. Four other schools in the area are under demolition orders.

"Direct attacks on the Palestinian people's homes, schools, livelihoods and water sources are nothing but Israel's attempts to curtail the Palestinians' right to self-determination and to threaten their very existence," the experts said.

"Israel's tactics of forcibly displacing and evicting the Palestinian population appear to have no limits. In occupied East Jerusalem, tens of Palestinian families also face imminent risks of forced evictions and displacement, due to discriminatory zoning and planning regimes that favour Israeli settlement expansion – the act that is illegal under international law and amounts to a war crime."

The experts also expressed alarm at the Israeli Government's endorsement and escalated

practice of punitive evictions and demolitions, and other punitive measures applied to alleged perpetrators of “terrorist” attacks and their family members, such as revoking identity documents, citizenship and residency rights and social security benefits.

On 29 January, Israeli authorities announced measures to immediately seal off family homes of those suspected of carrying out the attacks on 27 and 28 January in occupied East Jerusalem, including the attack in the Neve Yacoub settlement on 27 January which killed at least seven Israelis. Two families of the alleged attackers were forcibly evicted from their homes, and more than 40 people, including family members, were reportedly arrested in relation to the attacks.

“The rule of law must prevail in any State action against acts of violence. The sealing of family homes of suspected offenders and the subsequent demolition of their homes is in fundamental disrespect of international human rights norms and the rule of law. Such acts amount to collective punishment which is strictly prohibited under international law,” the experts said.

“We regret that impunity prevails, in particular for human rights violations and potential war crimes committed by the occupying power. It is high time for international adjudication bodies to determine the nature of the Israeli occupation and seek justice and accountability for all crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territory,” the UN experts said.

The experts have repeatedly raised concerns with the Government of Israel on these issues. No response has been received to date. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/un-experts-say-israel-should-be-held-accountable-acts-domicide>

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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>

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