



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Christianity in Society

col 363WH Nick Fletcher (Conservative): ...Recently, the census showed that fewer people identify as Christian. ... Many institutions seem to want to erase any references to their Christian heritage. ...

In conversations everywhere, the Lord's name is taken in vain and no one bats an eyelid. Rainbows were long understood to represent God's promise to never again flood the Earth, but I wonder how many people are even aware of that now. Religious literacy has been declining for decades. ...

Throughout British history, the Christian Church has pioneered some of the most profound and positive social changes ever to bless these islands. Here, as in many other parts of the world, Christians led the way with universal education and healthcare. ... so many of the laws and values that we now take for granted have their roots firmly in the Christian faith. ...

col 364WH Peter Grant (SNP): ... There is no doubt that it was people motivated by Christian beliefs who achieved all those social advances. It was also people who claimed to be Christians who introduced all those evils into the United Kingdom's society in the first place.

Nick Fletcher: ... Obviously, lots of people throughout the entirety of history may not have used their faith or interpretation of the Bible in the way that I and many Christians today believe they should have. ...

Many of our laws are based around the tablets given to Moses on Mount Sinai and the ethical teaching of the Old and New Testaments. ... The Christian faith is woven into the social and physical fabric of the United Kingdom. ...

col 365WH At the coronation, His Majesty the King will be anointed in the name of God as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, as well as Head of State. St Edward's crown, which will be placed on his head, contains a cross and orb symbolising the King and our world under the authority of God. Many people who do not have a personal faith in Christ still value this history and the benefits it has given us. ...

That brings me to the main reason why we should cherish the Christian faith, because I, like many others, believe it is true. ... The foundational premise of the gospel is that we are all sinners. We do wrong: wrong against God and wrong against one another, and we know it ...

People in the Old Testament covered their sins with sacrifices—their prized lamb or goat sacrificed to God. However, God knew we would never be able to meet his hopes for our lives, which is why the events of Easter happened. John 3:16, probably the most famous verse in the Bible, says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his...only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

At Christmas, we celebrate Christ’s birth. He came into the world as a unique person—one who was fully human like us, but also divine and therefore perfect and sinless. ...

col 366WH Christianity is not a religion only open to clever people. ... it is disproportionately a religion for the kind of people that elites look down on—the poor, the weak, the uneducated. ...

Forgiveness is given to us by God, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. ... It is a wonderful feeling to be forgiven, blessed and certain of the promise of eternal life. ...

col 368WH **Martin Vickers (Conservative):** ... Sadly, too many schools these days neglect the religious aspect of education. ... I recall attending a parents evening in what would have been the mid-1990s where, when questioned about religious education, he said that he did not regard the school’s role as to indoctrinate children, but to bring them to the threshold of faith—if only that were the case today.

Without knowledge of the Christian faith—a faith whose teachings form the basis of our laws and so many other foundations of our society—it is not possible to appreciate our history, culture and so much more. It is part of the glue that holds our society together. ...

Fiona Bruce (Conservative): ... Does my hon. Friend agree that many Christians across the country are worried about sharing their faith and even publicly quoting from the Bible because of what the law says? In fact, by law, religion or belief is a protected characteristic, as acknowledged by the Equality Act 2010. An expression of faith should not be given any less respect than any other protected characteristic. There is not a hierarchy, but does my hon. Friend agree that that is often how Christians feel? ...

Martin Vickers: ... There is a reluctance among the public to be open about their faith because they genuinely fear potential repercussions.

col 369WH **Edward Leigh (Conservative):** ... Although Christians might be in a minority in this country, people of faith are still in a very big majority—that includes Muslims, Hindus and many others. ...

col 371WH **Peter Grant (SNP):** ... We need to be careful about how we talk about the history and future of Christianity in our nations and elsewhere. ... although there is no doubt that people motivated by Christianity have been responsible for extraordinary acts of kindness, courage, bravery and selflessness, from the days of Christ himself, we cannot hide from the fact that people who claim to be acting in accordance with Christian teaching have been responsible for some of the most heinous acts ever committed on God’s earth. ...

col 372WH I do not accept the concept of anywhere being a Christian country. ...

Magna Carta, for example, is an exclusively English document. We should not mention Magna Carta without recognising that, by today’s standards, anyone who published it would be arrested because it was one of the most antisemitic documents that has ever been produced. It was very much of its day. While we might celebrate the liberties that it gave to some people, we have to recognise that for Jewish people in England at that time, Magna Carta was not going to liberate them from anywhere. The same is true, coincidentally, for the Claim of Right for Scotland because, by today’s standards, that is an extraordinarily anti-Catholic document. ...

col 373WH I do not think I have ever had any kind of religious-based abuse from anybody

who did not make it clear that they claim to be a Christian of some kind. ...

Essentially ... the decline in Christianity that we see in the United Kingdom has been caused by Christians giving up, losing interest or just stopping being particularly concerned about it. It has not been caused by outside influences. It is a problem that has been created here within our own Christian faiths, and it can be addressed only from within Christian faiths. ...

col 374WH I have to wonder whether people who get uncomfortable when church leaders comment on social matters are uncomfortable really about the fact that their church leaders are telling them that what they are doing, the way they are acting, is not in keeping with the teaching of their faith. Certainly when I look at the principles of Catholic social teaching—it is one of the things that drive me in this place—I find it difficult. ...

col 375WH Sarah Owen (Labour): ... We all know that, beneath those who make the headlines, many more Christians are working quietly and thanklessly on the ground, in all our constituencies, to support those who have fallen through the gaps of poverty and misfortune. Their generosity and compassion became most evident during the pandemic, when, alongside all people of faith and those of none, people relied on churches, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, mandirs and temples to get the message of public health and public safety out, to keep their communities fed and to meet a variety of other needs. ...

Peter Grant: ... the circumstances she is describing, whereby people of a variety of faiths and people of no particular faith have all come together for the common good, are a reminder that although many of us would hold fast to what we regard as Christian values, those values are not exclusively Christian ...

col 377WH The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): ... let me emphasise the importance of the Church as an essential pillar of society. It has been, and will always be, a bedrock of support for Christians, and it will always be an important institution in Britain. Our country has been built on Christian values, and the Church of England and the Church of Scotland are the two established Churches in the UK. ...

Faith in general is a vital part of people's identities and communities. The Government fully support the invaluable work being done by people around the country who are inspired by their faith. ...

The Church of England ... holds a unique place in our society. As senior members of the established Church of England, 26 bishops sit as individual Lords Spiritual and are impartial Members of the House of Lords. The monarchy also plays an important constitutional and religious role in the UK, with the sovereign acting as Head of State and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. ... Bishops provide an important independent voice and spiritual insight into the work of the upper House. While they make no claims to direct representation, they seek to be a voice for people of all faiths. ...

col 378WH Fiona Bruce: ... Can the Government give some clear guidance on the rights and freedoms of others in our society—Christians and those of other faiths—to publicly express their faith? ... can we make it absolutely clear that no one should be arrested simply for silently praying? ...

Felicity Buchan: ... No one should be in fear of professing their faith, regardless of which faith they belong to. ...

The latest census tells us that the number of Christians living in this country has decreased; however, Christianity remains the most prominent religion. Christianity has shaped this country's history, and we should recognise and celebrate that. We can all be proud of our Christian heritage and values. ...

col 379WH We were the first Government to commission a wide-ranging review of how the Government engage with faith. ... the independent faith engagement adviser, Colin Bloom, will soon publish his review. He will make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities about how the Government can celebrate the

contribution of faith groups and their positive role in society, while also tackling harmful practices. ...

I would like to express my gratitude to the Christian Church for everything it has done for the people of this country. The Government's support for the Christian Church reflects the importance of religion in the UK. Religion plays a significant role in the lives of many people, and the Government are committed to ensuring that it can continue to play a positive role in society. ...

col 380WH ... the Government are fully behind the work of our faith communities. Easter is the very foundation of the Christian faith. ... Easter is a time when we can all learn from Christians coming together, and a time we can all share with loved ones in unison. ...

Nick Fletcher: ... Easter is, more than anything else, a time to reflect. The main point of Easter is that Christ died for our sins and he forgave us. That is something we should all remember, and we should follow Christ's lead on that. No matter how we have been wronged, and no matter how far in the past—whether we were wronged centuries ago, weeks ago or today, or whether we will be wronged in the future—the message of Christ's story, more than anything else, is forgiveness. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-30/debates/A5BC4900-02F8-446C-9950-EC4EA8E10C3D/ChristianityInSociety>

House of Commons Oral Answer

Topical Questions: Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Philip Davies (Conservative) [904428] Some people particularly want to buy halal and kosher meat and some people particularly do not want to buy halal and kosher meat, so will the Government ensure that it must be properly labelled at the point of sale, so that people who particularly want to buy it or particularly do not want to buy it are able to make an informed decision?

Mark Spencer: The fundamental principle of food labelling rules is that information provided to consumers must not mislead. Based on evidence provided from a 2021 call for evidence on food labelling for animal welfare, we are still considering how to move forward.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-30/debates/00902B6A-1716-4DCF-BF84-C9096F7F306F/TopicalQuestions#contribution-E6E1C45A-0A4F-4427-BD0D-39D112DF71F7>

House of Lords Written Answer

Relationships and Sex Education

Lord Jackson of Peterborough (Conservative) [HL6569] To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to legislate to give parents and guardians the right to view all material used in teaching Relationship, Health and Sex Education curricula, including lessons and activities delivered by external contractors or partners.

Baroness Barran: The existing statutory guidance for relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) already places clear responsibilities on schools to engage parents about the content of lessons so that they know what their children are being taught. The department is clear that parents have a right to view teaching materials and that copyright law does not prevent a parent from viewing external resources on school premises. The department will be writing to schools shortly to confirm this position and that schools should not use external providers who would restrict their ability to do this.

On 8 March, the Prime Minister announced that the government had brought forward the review of the RSHE statutory guidance. This will enable the Department to consider the evidence and decide whether the provisions in the guidance need to be strengthened further to ensure that schools are fully transparent with parents.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-03-16/hl6569>

The guidance referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1090195/Relationships_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf

The announcement referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-03-08/debates/A182F3E8-6CA8-4FBC-B10E-8045D9374E73/Engagements#contribution-621502A9-ADDB-4B38-A5C9-60DCBB841FF6>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Kim Leadbeater (Labour) [171604] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his Israeli counterpart on the potential effect of that country's proposals to provide administrative powers over the West Bank to its Finance Minister on the status of the West Bank.

David Rutley: The Foreign Secretary has not discussed this issue with his Israeli counterpart, but it has long been the Government's view that Israel's presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is governed by the provisions of the Geneva Convention and we repeatedly call on Israel to abide by those obligations. We are still working to understand the full consequence of the changes you refer to, but our current understanding is that the administrative powers will remain within the Ministry of Defense and Bezalel Smotrich's involvement will be in his capacity as a junior Defence Minister.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-03-22/171604>

Israel: Palestinians

Kim Leadbeater (Labour) [171606] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the announcement by the government of Israel that it will legalise nine outposts in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

David Rutley: The UK's position on settlements and outposts is unchanged. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. The UK joined a number of international partners on 14 February to express our dismay at the decision to legalise nine outposts. This decision will only serve to exacerbate tensions and undermine efforts to achieve a negotiated two-state solution. The UK welcomes the recent talks in Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh and in particular the commitment by the Israeli government to stop the authorisation of outposts for six months. We will push the Israelis to make that temporary pause permanent.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-03-22/171606>

The joint statement referred to above can be read at

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

Shireen Abu Akleh

Kim Leadbeater (Labour) [171603] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had discussions with the Israeli Government on a full, impartial investigation into the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh.

David Rutley: The UK Government was deeply saddened by the death of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh last year and the Foreign Secretary once again extends his sympathies to her family. The Foreign Secretary has not personally discussed this matter with the Government of Israel, but officials from British Embassy Tel Aviv made clear the need for a thorough investigation. The UK Government's position is still that there must be a thorough and transparent investigation. The work of journalists across the globe is vital, and they must be protected from harm in the course of their duties.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-03-22/171603>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon I met Head of Palestinian Mission Husam Zomlot and reaffirmed UK commitment to a two state solution based on 1967 lines. We oppose unilateral moves that undermine progress towards this, including the expansion of Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law.

<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1641688006485581824>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Member states must abide by UN Charter and provide protection in the Occupied Palestinian territory: UN expert

At a moment of increased violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, with the new Israeli government threatening even further annexation, the international community must take firm and principled action to protect the human rights and dignity of Palestinians, a UN expert said today.

“The wave of deadly violence sweeping through the occupied West Bank since the beginning of this year is the inexorable consequence of an acquisitive and repressive occupation with no end in sight, and the culture of lawlessness and impunity Israel has nurtured and enjoyed,” said Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Israeli violence, including the deadly raid operations in Jenin refugee camp on 26 January, in the old city of Nablus on 22 February, and Jericho on 1 March have left a devastating toll of 80 Palestinians dead and over 2,000 wounded in less than 90 days. During the same period, 13 Israelis were killed by Palestinians. Israel’s deliberate and systemic destruction of homes, civilian infrastructure and property amidst hostile anti-Palestinian rhetoric and declared plans to further annex Palestinian lands, has compounded the sense of despair of the occupied population.

“Every loss of life, whether Palestinian or Israeli, is a tragic reminder of the price people pay for not addressing pervasive injustice and its root causes,” the Special Rapporteur said.

The international community has witnessed decades of record-high numbers of Palestinian deaths and injuries in the occupied territory. Meanwhile, Palestinians have also endured confinement, land confiscation, home demolitions, fragmentation, discriminatory law enforcement, mass incarceration and other countless abuses, indignities and humiliations, the expert said.

“Israel, emboldened by a lack of meaningful intervention, has consolidated its acquisitive

and repressive occupation, with Member States offering little more than symbolic condemnation, humanitarians providing band-aid aid, and legal scholars entangled in theoretical debates,” Albanese said.

The Special Rapporteur urged the UN to move beyond simply counting casualties and calling for restraint. “The organisation cannot indulge in the condescending acceptance of an irresolvable “conflict” and the myth of conflicting narratives, and in urging the ‘parties’ to ‘de-escalate tensions’ and ‘resume negotiations’,” Albanese said. “In reality, there are no equal parties nor a proper ‘conflict,’ but rather an oppressive regime that threatens the right of an entire people to exist.”

“Tolerating annexation would legitimise aggression, bringing international law back almost a century: this is the reality the international community must stop immediately and reverse.”

“To maintain its credibility and purpose, the UN must acknowledge that conflicting narratives and historical facts must be resolved through the lens of legality and justice, and work effectively to oppose any forms of annexation of occupied territory, realise the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and terminate the apartheid regime Israel is enforcing upon them,” the expert said.

“As ‘We the peoples of the United Nations,’ we must not remain silent in the face of egregious violations. The international community must recommit to the ideals of the UN Charter, in the interest of both Palestinians and Israelis,” the Special Rapporteur said. ...

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/member-states-must-abide-un-charter-and-provide-protection-occupied>

TOP

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>

Holocaust Memorial Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

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

**** Online Safety Bill**

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

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/49991/documents/3259>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill

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

Same Sex Marriage (Church of England)

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3438>

Schools Bill

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

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

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

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>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

Prospective Scheme of Delegation for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (closing date 15 May 2023)

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-prospective-scheme-delegation-charity-commission-northern-ireland>

Review of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (closing date 18 June 2023)

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-review-race-relations-ni-order-1997>

TOP

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