



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Government needs to better understand faith, independent review claims

A landmark review into faith engagement has found the government needs to recognise faith groups as a force for good. ...

More than 21,000 people responded to the public consultation and today Colin Bloom has set 22 recommendations for government. ...

Bloom noted that a better understanding of faith would also equip government to tackle issues such as forced marriage, of which there are estimated to be thousands a year in the UK; radicalisation in prison; and faith-based extremism, including the ongoing challenge of Islamist extremism, and the small but growing trends of Sikh extremism and Hindu nationalism.

Bloom also calls for appropriate regulation of out-of-school settings, including the faith-based sector, to safeguard the physical safety and wellbeing of children.

Colin Bloom ... said: "For millions of people, faith and belief informs who they are, what they do and how they interact with their community, creating strong ties that bind our country together."

"As we as a nation continue to become more diverse, so too does the landscape of faith and belief. Our government's understanding of the role of faith in society must remain both current and alive to its evolutionary changes."

"It must also not shy away from some of the challenges that exist in small pockets within faith communities, from forced and coercive marriages to faith-based extremism, financial exploitation, and child safeguarding. These must not be consigned to the 'too difficult' box."

"Greater understanding of faith in all its diversity will ensure that we remain a country that respects, celebrates and understands people of all faiths, beliefs and none."

Faith Minister, Baroness Scott of Bybrook said: "As Faith Minister I will continue to shine a light on the important work of faith groups across the country, who play such an important role in public life." ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-needs-to-better-understand-faith-independent-review-claims>

The Bloom Review: Does government 'do God?' An independent review into how government engages with faith

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf

Supreme Court

Judgement: Trustees of the Barry Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses (Appellant) v BXB (Respondent)

In this appeal, the Supreme Court is asked to decide whether the Jehovah's Witness organisation is vicariously liable for a rape committed by Mark Sewell, a former elder.

In 1984, Mr and Mrs B began attending services of the Barry Congregation. There, they made friends with Mark Sewell, his wife Mary, and their children. ... Mrs B considered Mark Sewell to be her best friend.

Towards the end of 1989, Mark Sewell's behaviour changed. He began abusing alcohol and appeared depressed. He began flirting with Mrs B, including hugging her, holding hands and kissing her. ... Concerned, Mrs B spoke to Mark Sewell's father, Tony, who like his son was an elder. Tony explained that Mark was suffering from depression and needed love and support. It was accepted at trial that, had it not been for the fact that Mark Sewell was an elder and Mrs B had received this instruction from Tony Sewell, their friendship would have come to an end. ...

On 30 April 1990, Mr and Mrs B and Mark and Mary Sewell were taking part in door-to-door evangelising. Afterwards ... Mark Sewell pushed Mrs B to the floor, held her down and raped her.

On 2 July 2014, Mark Sewell was convicted of raping Mrs B and seven counts of indecently assaulting two other individuals. He was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. ...

Mrs B commenced an action for damages for personal injury, including psychiatric harm, against the Watch Tower and Bible Tract Society of Pennsylvania (which is a charitable corporation that supports the worldwide religious activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses) and the Trustees of the Barry Congregation, alleging that they were vicariously liable for the rape committed by Mark Sewell. The trial judge found them vicariously liable for the rape and awarded Mrs B general damages of £62,000. The Court of Appeal upheld the trial judge's decision. The Trustees of the Barry Congregation now appeal to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court unanimously allows the appeal and holds that the Jehovah's Witness organisation is not vicariously liable for the rape committed by Mark Sewell. ...

Vicarious liability is an unusual form of liability by which the defendant is held liable for a tort (a civil wrong) committed by a third party. ... There are two stages of the inquiry, both of which have to be satisfied to find vicarious liability. ...

The first stage test is whether the relationship between the defendant and the tortfeasor was one of employment or akin to employment ...

The Supreme Court agrees with the lower courts that the relationship between the Jehovah's Witness organisation and Mark Sewell was akin to employment. The important features here rendering the relationship akin to employment were: that as an elder Mark Sewell was carrying out work on behalf of, and assigned to him by, the Jehovah's Witness organisation; that he was performing duties which were in furtherance of, and integral to, the aims and objectives of the Jehovah's Witness organisation; that there was an appointments process to be made an elder and a process by which a person could be removed as an elder; and that there was a hierarchical structure into which the role of an elder fitted.

The test at stage two asks, whether the wrongful conduct was so closely connected with acts that the tortfeasor was authorised to do that it can fairly and properly be regarded as

done by the tortfeasor while acting in the course of the tortfeasor's employment or quasi-employment. ...

At the second stage of the inquiry, the courts below erred by failing to set out the correct "close connection" test and taking into account incorrect factors. ...

The Supreme Court decides that the claimant has failed to satisfy the stage two test for the following reasons: (i) the rape was not committed while Mark Sewell was carrying out any activities as an elder; (ii) the primary reason the offence took place was that Mark Sewell was abusing his position as a close friend of Mrs B ...; (iii) it was unrealistic to suggest, as counsel for the claimant submitted, that Mark Sewell never took off his "metaphorical uniform" when dealing with members of the Barry Congregation; (iv) although Mark Sewell's role as an elder was a "but for" cause of Mrs B's continued friendship and hence of her being with him when the offence occurred, this is insufficient to satisfy the close connection test; (v) the appalling rape was not an objectively obvious progression from what had gone on before but was rather a shocking one-off attack; and (vi) other factors, such as the role played by Mark Sewell's father, and the failure of the Jehovah's Witness organisation to condemn Mark Sewell's inappropriate kissing of members of the congregation when welcoming them, were not relevant except as background. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.supremecourt.uk/press-summary/uksc-2021-0089.html>

To read the full judgement see

<https://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKSC/2023/15.html>

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Israel

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

“Peace will only be sustainable if both Israelis and Palestinians recommit themselves to a negotiated settlement”: UK Statement on the Middle East: Statement by Ambassador Woodward at the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East

Before starting, I recognise that today is Remembrance Day in Israel, and express the hope that this conflict which has cost so many lives on all sides may be brought to a just and peaceful end. ...

Sadly, in recent weeks we have witnessed violence that is unacceptable. We call on all parties to desist from unilateral measures which undermine peace, stability and the two-state solution.

First, de-escalation remains imperative. We condemn indiscriminate rocket fire into Israel from terror factions in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon. This year, 19 Israelis have been killed in acts of terrorism and 90 Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces. Among the former, three British-Israeli nationals, members of the same family, were victims of a terror attack in the West Bank on 7 April. The Palestinian Authority must denounce incitement to violence. There is never justification for such acts. Among Palestinian fatalities, a 15-year-old boy was killed near Jericho on 10 April. While Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence, its security forces must exercise restraint in use of force and investigate all fatalities.

Second, we urge all parties to cease unilateral actions which diminish prospects for peace. We condemn Israeli security forces' raids on Al Aqsa mosque during Ramadan,

injuring many worshippers, and we call on all parties to respect the historic Status Quo and Hashemite custodianship.

Third, we urgently need to redouble efforts towards a long-term peace. We applaud those laying foundations for dialogue, notably recent Jordanian, Egyptian and US initiatives. It remains critical that both Israel and the Palestinians respect commitments made, including Israel's commitment to suspend settlement advancement. Settlements are illegal under international law and threaten the viability of a two-state solution. Our position is reflected in our enduring support for UN Security Council Resolution 2334.

The UK remains committed to working with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and international partners, to bring an end to the terrorism that Israel faces, and the destructive cycle of violence that continues. Peace will only be sustainable if both Israelis and Palestinians recommit themselves to a negotiated settlement, leading to a secure Israel alongside a viable Palestinian State.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/peace-will-only-be-sustainable-if-both-israelis-and-palestinians-recommit-themselves-to-a-negotiated-settlement-uk-statement-on-the-middle-east>

James Cleverly Yom Ha'atzmaut Sameach to Israel on its 75th birthday. There is so much that unites us. Together we stand defiant against the malign influence of Iran and against the scourge of antisemitism [British flag] [Israeli flag]

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1651173094411710465>

United Nations

Violence in Middle East Increased Despite Major Religious Observances, Special Coordinator Tells Security Council, Urging Two-State Solution

... **Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process**, noting the recent Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which overlapped with Christian Easter and Jewish Passover, said this holy period, while mostly calm, regrettably also witnessed shocking incidents of violence at the holy sites. Overall, in the occupied West Bank, 17 Palestinians, including two children, were killed and 200 Palestinians, including 4 women and 38 children, were injured by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, and other incidents. Another 39 Palestinians were injured by Israeli settlers or other civilians, while four Israeli civilians were killed and 31 injured by Palestinians in shooting and ramming attacks, clashes, the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, and other incidents. ...

... on 4 and 5 April, confrontations erupted at the holy sites in Jerusalem when Israeli security forces entered the al-Qibli prayer hall of Al-Aqsa Mosque and forcibly removed Palestinians who were barricaded inside. The security forces deployed stun grenades, beat Palestinians with batons and rifles, and fired rubber-coated metal bullets, while some Palestinians inside the mosque lit and threw fireworks and stones. These developments came in the wake of provocative calls, he said, noting that Israeli extremists called for Jews to conduct ritual animal sacrifices at the holy sites, while Hamas and other armed Palestinian factions called for Palestinians to resist such acts. Israeli police blocked attempts to carry out the animal sacrifices in the compound, on 4 and 5 April, he said, noting that militants in Gaza and Lebanon fired dozens of rockets towards Israel, causing one injury and damage to property. ...

... he also pointed to confrontations between Israeli police and Orthodox Christian worshippers. Also spotlighting other violence in the occupied West Bank and in Israel, he said many Palestinian casualties were incurred in Israeli military operations in Area A of the occupied West Bank and subsequent clashes ... on 16 March, undercover Israeli

forces entered Jenin and shot and killed four Palestinians, including a 14-year-old bystander. On 7 April, two British-Israeli sisters, the youngest a 15-year-old girl, were killed in a shooting attack in the West Bank by perpetrators in a car with Palestinian plates. Noting high levels of settler-related violence, he said that Huwwara remained a flashpoint. Expressing concern about the violence and inflammatory actions over the past weeks, particularly the violent confrontations inside Al-Aqsa Mosque, he urged respect for the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem, in line with the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Condemning the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centres, he added that security forces must exercise maximum restraint and use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable to protect life....

Highlighting settlement-related developments, he said that on 22 March, Israeli authorities announced tenders for 940 housing units in settlements in Area C and 89 units in East Jerusalem. Further, on 10 April, Israeli Government Ministers and members of the Knesset joined over 15,000 settlers and other Israeli civilians in a heavily secured march to the illegal outpost of Evyatar in the northern West Bank, calling on the Government to legalize it under Israeli law. ...

The Palestinian Authority continues to face significant fiscal and institutional challenges ... Expressing concern about the prolonged closure of schools and health clinics in the West Bank, he stressed the need to strengthen Palestinian institutions, improve governance and shore up the fiscal health of the Palestinian Authority. ...

Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, recalling that 75 years ago Palestinian people endured Nakba — dispossession and displacement of an entire nation - said that almost overnight two thirds of the people became refugees. “Seventy-five years later, the Nakba continues,” he added ... Pointing out that double standards, selectivity, and “schizophrenia” undermine the authority of international law, he lamented that Israel is not being held accountable for breaching the law. ...

Underscoring his commitment to the two-State solution, he expressed concern that Palestine can no longer salvage it. Settlers will not only take over Palestinian land but will take over Israeli politics and turn a political conflict into a religious conflict, he stressed ... he encouraged Member States to recognize the State of Palestine, adding: “Why did you not wait for our approval to recognize Israel and need Israeli permission to recognize the State of Palestine?” ...

Gilad Menashe Erdan (Israel) said that each time he steps into the Security Council Chamber, he mentally prepares himself to hear bias against his country — the only liberal democracy in the region. Yet today’s debate has crossed all lines, leaving him not only appalled and outraged, but saddened. He stressed that 25 April is one of most sacred days of the year for Israel: *Yom HaZikaron*, or Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers of the Wars of Israel and Victims of Actions of Terrorism, when every Israeli remembers those who paid the ultimate price while defending the Jewish homeland, a day of mourning when two sirens in the morning and evening bring all activity to a halt for two minutes of silence, while a television channel runs the names of every fallen hero. While his delegation had made numerous requests to reschedule the meeting, the Council refused to budge, only further proving what Israelis feel about “this biased organization” ...

... the Council was falsely painting Israel as the root of all the region’s problems, which could not be further from the truth. The only reason the conflict has not been resolved, he stated, is that the Palestinians refuse to acknowledge the existence of Israel, the Jewish State, which they have proven by rejecting every peace initiative and inciting to terror and brainwashing their children to hate and murder Jews. Meanwhile, he stated that the true threat to the region and world — “the Ayatollah regime in Iran”, he said — will, as usual, not even be a footnote in the discussion. ...

Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and Council

President for April ... sound[ed] alarm over the unprecedented growth of tensions and violence in the area of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. ... Since the beginning of 2023, as a result of clashes related to the holy sites, more than 100 Palestinians perished and thousands were wounded. The number of Israeli victims is also growing. ...

Khalifa Shaheen, Minister for State of the United Arab Emirates, emphasized that the special status of the holy city of Jerusalem must not be compromised. The historical and legal status quo, as well as the Hashemite custodianship of the holy sites, must be respected in word and in practice. He said he believed that Israel's decision to prevent settlers from storming Al-Aqsa Mosque during the last 10 days of Ramadan prevented further confrontations. ...

Nicolas De Rivière (France), condemning all violence against civilians, whether targeting Israelis or Palestinians, said this cycle of violence will only end when Israeli settlements end. "France will never recognize illegal annexation of territories," he stressed ... The Council has a responsibility to defend the two-State solution and ensure compliance with its resolutions, he said, also highlighting the treaty signed by Israel with its neighbours and the need to respect the historic status quo of the holy sites in Jerusalem. ...

Linda Thomas-Greenfield (United States), condemning terrorist attacks and all violence against civilians, underscored the imperative for all parties to exercise restraint and prevent the escalation of violence. She further condemned the recent rocket attacks by Palestinian militants from Gaza and Lebanon as well as attacks launched from Syria which endangered civilians. ... Recognizing Israel's ability to exercise its inherent right to self-defence, she noted that good faith dialogue remains the best path to stability. ...

Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom), stressing that de-escalation remains imperative, condemned indiscriminate rocket fire into Israel from terror factions in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon. So far in 2023, 19 Israelis have been killed in acts of terrorism and 90 Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces, she noted, adding that the former includes three British-Israeli nationals. All parties must cease unilateral actions which diminish prospects for peace, she said, condemning Israeli security forces' raids on Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan, injuring many worshippers, and calling on all parties to respect its historic status quo and Hashemite custodianship. ... [[click here](#) to read this speech in more detail]

Mahmoud Daifallah Hmoud (Jordan) stressed the importance of regional and international efforts to stop the deterioration in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, to ensure de-escalation by putting an end to all measures that stand in the way of de-escalation ... he stressed the need to respect the legal and historic status quo of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. ...

Osama Mahmoud Abdelkhalek Mahmoud (Egypt) ... criticized continued violations by Israel, including the expansion of settlements, demolition of Palestinian structures and killing of unarmed civilians, including children. ... Holy sites were violated during the holy days of three religions in violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. ... The historical and legal status of holy sites in East Jerusalem must be respected and international protection provided for the Palestinian people. Moreover, the blockade of the Gaza Strip must be lifted, UNRWA supported, peace negotiations restarted and the role of the Quartet revived.

Jeanne Mrad (Lebanon) ... condemned the violence committed by Israeli security forces, adding that the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the arrest of hundreds of worshippers during Ramadan are provocative to Muslims around the world. ... Israel has no sovereignty over the holy sites of East Jerusalem, she stressed, condemning all attempts to alter their demographic character and Arab identity. ...

The new Israeli Government, she added, is inciting violence and is ignoring all legal and humanitarian norms in defiance of the international community. ... Also expressing support for the request of an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice regarding the

occupation, she called on all counties to provide written and oral submissions to the Court. ...

Bassam Sabbagh (Syria) ... said the month of Ramadan annually witnesses an Israeli criminal escalation and aggressive practices against the Palestinian people that put all humanity to shame. It is unfortunate that the Council stands witness to these crimes against humanity and does not lift a finger, or is not allowed to do so. He stressed that Israel — the occupying Power — was and still is the only reason behind the emergence and continuation of the plight and tragedy of the Palestinian people. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15264.doc.htm>

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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>

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>

Committee Stage, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-04-25/debates/8A42D322-903C-485F-907E-11FDF4EDCB08/OnlineSafetyBill>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-04-25/debates/8234D7A4-68A0-4598-98CA-F1F5F833B168/OnlineSafetyBill>

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>

**** Universal Jurisdiction (Extension)**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3454>

First Reading, House of Commons

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-04-25/debates/63E9FC89-9019-4BF4-AF9B-EA3B88322941/UniversalJurisdiction\(Extension\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-04-25/debates/63E9FC89-9019-4BF4-AF9B-EA3B88322941/UniversalJurisdiction(Extension))

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

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>

Supporting earlier resolution of private family law arrangements (closing date 15 June 2023)

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/private-family-law-consultation/>

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>

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