



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Lords Written Answers

Funerals: Standards

Lord Rooker (Labour) [HL9990] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of delays in funerals being caused by (1) the existing system for registering a death, (2) the number of available pathologists, (3) delays in completion of Medical Certificate Cause of Death forms and access to local GPs, (4) the availability of mortuary storage at local hospitals and public mortuaries, and (5) any delays by medical examiners.

Lord Bellamy: Whilst the Government does not have operational responsibility for the provision of funeral services, we are aware of funeral delays in some areas and acknowledge that these are often exacerbated by pressures from within the wider death management system.

Government departments are taking a collaborative approach to reforming the death registration system as part of the roll out of the statutory medical examiner scheme which will come into force in April 2024. The doctor who attended the deceased during their last illness has a legal responsibility to complete a Medical Certificate Cause of Death (MCCD) as soon as possible to enable the registration of the death to take place. Guidance for doctors on completing an MCCD, available on Gov.uk, emphasises this point. As part of the work on the statutory medical examiner scheme, the Department of Health and Social Care is looking at expanding the pool of doctors who can sign the MCCD forms. When the demand on civil registration services is high, death registration appointments will always take priority over other registration appointments.

The Government continues to look at wider improvements to the death management system's capacity and resilience, including mortuary capacity. The shortage of pathologists is a long-standing and cross-cutting issue. The Government is determined to make progress as soon as practicable. To that end, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State is engaging with Ministerial colleagues to implement effective solutions through a cross-government action plan.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-07/hl9990>

The Guidance referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1062236/Guidance_for_Doctors_completing_medical_certificates_Mar_22.pdf

Islamic Human Rights Commission

Lord Godson (Conservative) [HL9775] To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Lord Murray of Blidworth on 11 July (HL8821) and Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay on 4 July (HL8822), what assessment has been made by (1) the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, and (2) the Home Office, of the suitability of the Islamic Human Rights Commission and IHRC Legal in light of the official warning of the Charity Commission in relation to the Islamic Human Rights Commission Trust.

Lord Murray of Blidworth: The Islamic Human Rights Commission Ltd is currently registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). The OISC keeps in close contact with the organisation and audits it regularly. Organisations seeking regulation by the Commissioner are required to abide by the OISC's Guidance on Fitness (Owners). The criteria for assessing fitness include the likelihood of compliance with the OISC's Regulatory Scheme, a history of honesty and legal compliance, as well as a history of financial probity. The OISC is a non-departmental arms' length body of the Home Office. The Home Office is satisfied that the OISC is undertaking appropriate assessments in relation to the Islamic Human Rights Commission.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-04/hl9775>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-27/hl8821>
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-27/hl8822>

The Guidance referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/510307/owners_2016.pdf

The Regulatory Scheme referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulations-that-immigration-advisers-must-follow--2/regulations-that-immigration-advisers-must-follow>

House of Commons Library Briefing

Relationships and sex education in schools (England)

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06103/SN06103.pdf>

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Israel

See also the Westminster Hall debate on “Freedom of Religion and Belief” that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Written Answers

The following three questions all received the same answer

Israel: Palestinians

Sarah Champion (Labour) [198525] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign,

Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his counterpart in Israel on the treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system.

Sarah Champion (Labour) [198526] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made a recent assessment of the implications for his policies of the Government of Israel's level of compliance with the recommendations made in UNICEF's report entitled Children in Israeli Military Detention: Observations and recommendations, published in 2003.

Sarah Champion (Labour) [199219] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to work with the Israeli Government to help secure improvements to the condition of Palestinian children in military detention.

David Rutley: The UK draws on a wide range of sources when assessing human rights issues in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including the treatment of Palestinian children. We have issues about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary. The Israeli authorities must comply with their obligations under international law and either charge or release detainees. We remain committed to working with the Israeli government to secure improvements to the practices surrounding children in detention and continue to raise this with the Israeli Ministry of Justice through our embassy in Tel Aviv. The Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, also frequently meets with charities and NGOs regarding issues relating to the occupation. He most recently discussed child detention in a meeting with representatives of Save The Children, Oxfam GB, Medical Aid for Palestinians and Christian Aid on 4 July.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-08/198525>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-08/198526>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-12/199219>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/216/file/Children%20in%20Israeli%20Military.pdf>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Mahmoud Abbas

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [198646] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the compatibility of comments made by the President of the Palestinian National Authority on the Holocaust on 24 August 2023 with the UK's memorandum of understanding with the Palestinian Authority.

Bob Blackman (Conservative) [198647] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Palestinian National Authority on the comments made by the President of the Palestinian National Authority on the Holocaust on 24 August 2023.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: As the FCDO stated publicly on 8 September, the UK condemns the recent antisemitic remarks made by President Abbas. The UK stands firmly against all attempts to distort the Holocaust. Such statements do not advance efforts towards reconciliation. Officials at the British Consulate General in Jerusalem have raised this matter with the Palestinian Authority and the Foreign Secretary intends to do the same during his visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. President Abbas' comments are completely unacceptable and can only

serve to exacerbate tensions and undermine efforts to achieve the negotiated two-state solution.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-11/198646>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-11/198647>

A video of Mahmoud Abbas' speech, referred to above, with English subtitles, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haF2efyugW8>

The FCDO statement (in the form of a written answer) referred to above can be read at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-11/198882>

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Landmark agreement with Israel takes UK global science mission to new heights

... Israel will become the latest country to sign a landmark agreement with the UK, to collaborate on science and innovation, when the two countries' Science Ministers meet in London later today (Wednesday 20 September). As part of the deal, both countries will commit a total of £1.7 million in of support to joint research focused on technologies critical to our future prosperity and quality of life, like quantum. ...

The Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Israel will be signed later today, in the heart of historic Whitehall. Elevating the already-strong bonds between the UK and Israel's research and technology communities – with some of the £1.7 million announced today also supporting UK researchers to build their links with partners in Israel – will support high-skilled jobs and drive economic growth, one of the Prime Minister's five priorities.

George Freeman MP, Minister of State at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology said: Israel is known as the Start-up Nation for good reason: from its world-leading approach to R&D, to its flourishing biotech, cyber, space and agritech sectors, it is truly one of the world's most innovative economies.

That's why I prioritised Israel alongside Japan and Switzerland as one of our first priority R&D collaborations, in our network of global collaborations, to better attract investment and support the global impact of UK innovation as part of our science superpower mission.

This collaboration is structured in the standard 3 pillars - research, commercialisation and bilateral government priorities - and will take our deep and longstanding science and technology partnership to new heights, to the benefit of scientists, researchers, investors and companies in both nations.

Minister Ofir Akunis of Israel's Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology said: I'm delighted and proud to sign today the Bilateral Memorandum of Understanding between the Israeli Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology (MOST) and the UK Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

I believe this signing will contribute significantly to the scientific and technological cooperation and networking between scientists and entrepreneurs across many sectors in both our countries.

Over the years, our two countries have developed excellent, cutting-edge technology in many fields. This collaboration will not only benefit our scientific communities but will also benefit the broader economy, and security of our nations.

By boosting the UK and Israel's science and research links, the deal builds on the objectives of the [UK Science and Technology Framework](#), which sets out how the government will consistently champion and strengthen the UK's science and technology sectors overseas through work with international governments, academics, industries and more. The bonds between both countries' innovators are being further bolstered by the

UK's association to Horizon Europe, of which Israel is also a non-EU associate member. The funding being announced today includes £1.1 million which will go towards Universities UK International's UK-Israel Innovation Mobility Scheme, supporting UK-based researchers to travel to Israel and work jointly with Israeli partners, at top Israeli institutions.

More than £600,000 will support the UK-Israel quantum collaboration being led by the UK Atomic Energy Authority, to develop disruptive new quantum technologies that could eventually be rolled out commercially, to underpin the workings of quantum computers.

All of this forms part of the £20 million commitment for science, research and innovation collaboration in the UK-Israel Bilateral Roadmap, which was signed by both countries' Foreign Ministers in March.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-agreement-with-israel-takes-uk-global-science-mission-to-new-heights>

United Nations

Secretary-General Urges 'Statesmanship, Not Gamesmanship and Gridlock' to Resolve Global Challenges, Geopolitical Tensions, Opening Annual General Assembly Debate

... **António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations**, warned ... In the Middle East, unilateral actions are undermining the possibility of a two-State solution — the only pathway to lasting peace and security for Palestinians and Israelis. ...

Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, King of Jordan, said ... the entire region ... will continue to suffer until the world "helps lift the shadow" of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. "Without clarity on where Palestinians' future lies, it will be impossible to converge on a political solution to this conflict," he said. Five million Palestinians live under occupation with no say in their lives. Yet every UN resolution since the beginning of the conflict recognizes the equal rights of the Palestinian people to a future of peace, dignity and hope.

"We can see the Israeli people actively defending and engaging in the expression of their national identity. Yet, the Palestinian people are deprived of that same right," he continued. The basic requirement for that right is the establishment of their own independent and viable State, on 1967 lines with East Jerusalem as its capital. For its part, Jordan remains committed to safeguarding Jerusalem's identity, he continued, also urging sustainable funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). "We must protect young Palestinians from extremists who prey on their frustrations and hopelessness by making sure they continue to learn at schools under the blue flag of the United Nations, as the alternative will be the black flags of terror, hate and extremism," he stressed. ...

Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir of Qatar ... said that it is unacceptable for the Palestinian people to remain prisoners of the Israeli occupation. The failure of the international community to act against the occupation continues to provide Israel with the opportunity to undermine the foundations of the two-State solution. Israel responds to Arab peace and normalization initiatives with more nationalist and ultra-orthodox extremism. This is reflected in Government coalitions, further settlement expansion, the Judaization of Jerusalem, attacks on holy sites and tightening the noose on the Gaza Strip. For its part, Qatar provides political, humanitarian and development support to the Palestinian people and contributes towards rebuilding the Gaza Strip. ...

Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi, President of Iran, noted that the Qur'an speaks of equality among humans, encourages serving those less fortunate and forbids all forms of violence in human interaction. Holding up a copy, he underscored: "The fires of disrespect will not overcome the divine truth." Spotlighting the Islamophobia and cultural apartheid

witnessed in Western countries, he underlined the need for respect for world religions to hold a prominent place on the United Nations agenda. Further, concurrent with the war on Islam, the world is also witnessing a war against the framework of the family, which is a fundamental pillar supporting human development. He therefore called on all religious leaders to uphold their historical responsibility to defend the sanctity of the family and on the United Nations to properly protect this framework.

Noting that history is at a critical juncture, he said that Western hegemony “no longer resonates with the realities of today’s world”, that the former liberal order has been “relegated to obsolescence” and that “attempts to universalize American ideals throughout the world” have failed. Instead, there exists a collective hope for the creation of a novel, equitable world order — central to which is abandoning global arrogance in favour of regional cooperation. Further, the formation of East-West divides should not be permitted, nor should be making trade corridors unsafe, stifling the economic progress of sovereign nations or fomenting proxy wars. Noting that these actions — ironically — are conducted in the name of defending Western democracy, he said that the global community has discerned the true essence of such democracy — “nothing more than a velvet glove hiding a cast-iron hand”.

He went on to state that Iran’s good-neighbour policy seeks to increase regional cooperation and forbid external meddling “from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf”. Any foreign presence is not part of the solution — rather, it is the problem itself. Stressing that the most serious threats in Western Asia are extremism and fundamentalism, he said that the surgical use of terrorists by Western Governments will be overcome by the collective will of the people of the region. “Discrimination in the fight against terrorism is a green light given to the terrorists themselves,” he emphasized. Turning to Palestine, he asked whether “the time has come” to end 75 years of occupation, demolition and the spilling of the blood of women and children. The situation in Afghanistan is another example of foreign meddling in the region, and he called on the international community to provide the assistance necessary to address the crisis of refugees driven from that country — many of whom have been given refuge in Iran.

On Ukraine, he underscored his country’s “unambiguous position” that it does not support any war — neither in Europe nor anywhere else — and that it supports any initiative aimed towards the cessation of hostilities. Stressing that the United States’ leaving of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was an “inappropriate response” to Iran’s fulfilment of its commitments within that framework, he called on Washington, D.C., to choose a path — “either JCPOA or not”. While stating that nuclear weapons have no place in Iran’s defensive or military doctrines, he nevertheless stressed that his country “will never fall short” of obtaining its inherent right to peaceful nuclear energy. He added that the United States’ use of sanctions has not yielded the desired result, calling on that country to “cease traveling on the wrong path”. Reiterating that humanity is entering a new framework, he said that while old Powers will continue their trajectory “they represent the past, and we are the future”. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/ga12530.doc.htm>

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Foreign Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Freedom of Religion and Belief

col 453WH Fiona Bruce (Conservative): ... Freedom of religion or belief is a foundational

right, but sadly violations of it are increasing across the world, by countries at scale, by terror groups and mobs, and through abuses against individuals imprisoned for their beliefs who so boldly and bravely stand and suffer for their faith. ...

That is why, after the London ministerial last July on freedom

col 454WH What are the practical next steps that have been taken since the London ministerial last July? IRFBA—a difficult acronym to say—has inspired a 24-hour global virtual youth conference on FORB. This will take place on 19 and 20 October ...

... curriculum materials have been developed for the very youngest children—five and upwards—to understand the importance of not discriminating against others on account of their religion or belief, with a pilot being undertaken in four schools in the UK ... Preliminary feedback is encouraging —children as young as five can quickly grasp the concept of FORB ...

We are championing individual prisoners of conscience—at least one a month over the last year—and we have already seen two people imprisoned for their beliefs released. ...

We are building an international network of FORB roundtables, such as the UK FORB Forum ... We are networking and supporting human rights defenders working on FORB.

We are better engaging with the media on FORB. ... We are working on atrocity prevention to help to call out abuses earlier. We are working with lawyers on legislative reform.

col 455WH We are looking to protect religious and cultural heritage with a very active working group, and we are beginning to network on international best practice for trauma counselling and rehabilitation ...

That is the good news; and why is it so important? Because of the bad news. The bad news is that it has never been more important to champion FORB because it has never been more at risk. What is the evidence? Look across the world at what has happened in the over two and a half years since I was appointed as the UK Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief in December 2020. ...

col 456WH All the FORB violations ... in all the countries where FORB violations have increased, are impacting on millions of people across the world. It is a tragedy that so many violations are happening in our time and that the numbers of people affected are so huge. Individual men, women and children are affected. They are suffering simply because of what they believe and simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But there are too many wrong places and this is in our time, the 21st century.

It is a tragic paradox that globalisation, which not long ago, in the 20th century, was heralded as the route to a more connected, confident and civilised future for the world, seems to have spawned, in the 21st century, a far more insecure, fractious and fragmented international landscape. The current global trajectory is away from a rights-based order or consensus, prioritising democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law, to what could increasingly be described as a values-based order—and those values are not always positive, focusing on national, religious, ethnic or political priorities. ...

col 457WH For authoritarians, FORB represents an existential threat. For states and rulers who seek to impose their worldview or ideology and who wish to control the national narrative, the public presence of diverse and vocal religious and belief groups is intolerable. ...

As well as the autocrats—the so-called bad guys—regrettably, too many Governments, which may be called “the good guys”, view FORB merely as a niche interest, to be engaged by a few of us with a particularly religious perspective on life. ... That perception has to change. ...

FORB is a foundational human right. FORB concerns should therefore be core concerns at every international summit, because they are at the core of so many human rights violations today. ...

col 458WH Citizens cannot be truly free if they cannot live according to their beliefs. Without the expression of what has long been considered a sacred inner liberty, external rights lack grounding and legitimacy. Political, social and economic freedoms cannot co-

exist alongside major limitations on FORB. FORB can exist without democracy, but it is hard to see how democracy can exist without FORB. ...

col 460WH Theresa Villiers (Conservative): “You may choose to look the other way, but you can never again say you did not know.” Those were the words of William Wilberforce in a 1791 debate in this House on the slave trade, quoted by the Bishop of Truro in his groundbreaking 2019 report on the persecution of Christians. ...

col 461WH Research by organisations such as Aid to the Church in Need and Christian Solidarity Worldwide tells us that thousands are suffering simply because they want to follow their faith in freedom. ...

col 462WH Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op): ... I will focus on the effects of social media on promoting misinformation, intolerance and inflammatory speech that challenges people’s right to freedom of religion or belief, especially in crisis areas. The danger of social media companies in that respect has been noted by the companies themselves. A Meta company worker said in 2019: “We have evidence from a variety of sources that hate speech, divisive political speech, and misinformation on Facebook...are affecting societies around the world. We also have compelling evidence that our core product mechanics, such as virality, recommendations, and optimizing for engagement, are a significant part of why these types of speech flourish on the platform.” ...

In 2021, many fake social media accounts pretended to be “#RealSikh” members of the community in India. A groundbreaking report by Benjamin Strick of the Centre for Information Resilience, reported on by the BBC, found at least 80 fake accounts, many using profile pictures of celebrities, posting divisive posts seeking to discredit Sikh political interests such as the farmers’ protests, often labelling them as extremist or claiming their infiltration by extremist groups. Benjamin Strick said that the aim of the network appears to have been to “alter perceptions on important issues around Sikh independence, human rights and values”

Those accounts have now been suspended because they were fake. The danger of such information has led to religious and ethnic violence and tensions. ...

col 463WH The network used so-called sock puppets—fake accounts controlled by real users, as opposed to automated bots—posing as independent people. ...

His Majesty’s Government must do more. More must be done to enforce respect for FORB throughout the world, particularly in the United Kingdom and its partner nations. ...

col 464WH Kevin Foster (Conservative): ... for too many across the world, the simple act of attending church on Sunday can mean putting their life on the line.

The protection for FORB in the 1966 international covenant on civil and political rights is binding on states that have signed it. To date, there are 173 parties to the covenant ...

As touched on already, religious persecution is still too common across the world. In 2020, US-based Pew Research Centre found that Government or societal harassment was reported in 155 countries against Christians, in 145 against Muslims and in 94 against Jews, out of the 198 countries surveyed. Globally, apostasy—renouncing a faith or belief—is potentially punishable by death in at least 10 countries, as is the case in seven for blasphemy. ...

col 466WH Ruth Jones (Labour): ... International human rights law is underpinned by the universal declaration of human rights. When a human right is abused anywhere, that contributes to the breakdown of the rule of law everywhere. Of course, such a breakdown will have a huge impact on the democracy and health of communities the world over, which is why it is vital for parliamentarians and elected representatives of the people at all levels of government to uphold the universal declaration of human rights. We should be able to worship our gods and have our beliefs according to our consciences, and we should allow all other men, women and children to have the same privileges and let them also worship how, where and who they want. ...

col 467WH Rehman Chishti (Conservative): ... the question is this: how do the United

Kingdom Government advance international religious freedom as a top priority? Page 3 of the report produced by the House of Commons Library on 8 September 2023 reads: “In her submission to the Backbench Business Committee, Fiona Bruce MP, who acts as the UK Government’s Special Envoy on FoRB, raised 13 countries of particular concern: Algeria, Afghanistan, China, Eritrea, Iran, Myanmar, Nigeria, Nicaragua, Russia, Sudan, Tunisia, Ukraine, and Uganda.”

They were also on my desk when I was the envoy. How do we make those countries accountable?

We have the tools. Our key tool is sanctions. I am a former Minister for sanctions; we have seen the key role that sanctions have played in addressing Putin’s illegal war in Ukraine. In how many of those 13 countries have we applied sanctions to individuals who are FORB violators? ...

In the United States, Knox Thames, who was a State Department adviser for over 20 years, ... said that the United States has only once ever refused a visa to an individual for FORB violations. If it is once in the United States, how many times have we in the United Kingdom refused visas for individuals who breach religious freedom or belief? ...

The other point I want to raise is with regard to a closed petition condemning the burning of the Holy Koran in Sweden. A petition was put to the House of Commons, and 64,000 people signed it. It made the point that where individuals burn holy books with regard to the incitement of hatred, whether it is the Koran, the Torah, the Guru Granth, the Gita or the Injil—across the board—that kind of behaviour incites intolerance and hatred. Therefore, countries such as Sweden and Denmark that allow it under freedom of expression need to reconsider what that leads to. ...

I finish with words from His Holiness Pope Francis. On the burning of the Holy Koran, he said he was “angry and disgusted” and that he “rejected and condemned” permitting the act as a form of freedom of speech. I ask the Minister to make very clear the United Kingdom Government’s commitment to ensure respect for all scriptures and that, whenever that is violated, we call it out, and to ensure that we do everything to make representations to Denmark and Sweden so that this kind of behaviour does not go unchallenged.

col 468WH Patrick Grady (SNP): ... the denial of those rights is on the rise around the world. Perhaps one of the most frustrating and disappointing aspects of this is that the persecution of people for their religion or belief is most often carried out by people who hold or practise a religion or belief of their own. Yet a core teaching of almost every major world religion is the golden rule of the ethic of reciprocity, which is that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated. Peace and justice are preached, but too often violence and oppression are practised. ...

col 469WH The struggle for peace and justice in the Holy Land, which has been mentioned, is incredibly complex, but respect for freedom of religion has to be at the centre of any just and lasting solution. Yet extreme elements of the Government of Israel are pushing for arrangements and territorial designations that will make access to holy sites for Christians—not just residents, but potentially tourists and pilgrims—much more difficult. ...

col 471WH Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op): ... We know that in many cases the greatest persecutors and inhibitors of such freedom can be states themselves. ...

As we have heard on a number of occasions, the rising intolerance of authoritarian regimes throughout the world is supplemented by the increasing use of technology as a means of state-sponsored repression and the increased adoption and implementation of anti-blasphemy laws and the criminalisation of apostasy.

Rehman Chishti: The hon. Gentleman mentions the role of authoritarian states, but what about democratic states? The House of Commons Library briefing dated 8 September contains a question by the special envoy to the Second Church Estates Commissioner, in which she referenced the killing of about 100 people, and the displacement of 50,000, in

Manipur in India. We have a strategic foreign policy objective of prosperity, security and values, and we have engagement with the Indo-Pacific region on security, but then we have issues in a democratic state with regard to religious minorities. How would the hon. Gentleman go about addressing those challenges and engaging with a country as important for the United Kingdom as India? What levers would he use?

Stephen Doughty: We have to have a robust, honest and candid dialogue with our closest friends and allies. ...

col 472WH On the persecution of Jews, antisemitism is utterly abhorrent and I know that all hon. Members will condemn it in all its manifestations. The most recent report from the special rapporteur, in 2019, stated clearly that “in many States antisemitic harassment is significantly underreported. Nevertheless, reports of hostility, discrimination and violence motivated by antisemitism have increased in many parts of the world.”

Eighty-five per cent of respondents “felt that antisemitism was a serious problem in their respective countries, 34 per cent reported that they avoided visiting Jewish events or sites because of safety concerns, and 38 per cent had considered emigrating because they did not feel safe as Jews.”

The UK has a critical role to play both at home and abroad, whether on the desecration of cemeteries, on attacks and killings at synagogues or on the daily persecution and discrimination that so many Jewish people face around the world. ...

col 473WH ... it was good to see that the G20 communiqué specifically highlighted UN General Assembly resolution 318, particularly its “commitment to promote respect for religious and cultural diversity, dialogue and tolerance”, but can the Minister outline why this issue did not feature in the G7’s communiqué and whether the UK, as a leading member of the G7, the Security Council and other bodies, will ensure that we use all forums to highlight these issues?

Secondly, what steps are being taken more broadly to ensure that freedom of religion is prioritised internally? ...

Finally, could the Minister explain how the Government continue to engage with diaspora, civil society and religious communities here in the UK on setting priorities? ...

col 473WH The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): ... The shared passion in the House for protecting freedom of religion or belief alongside other human rights is clear and warranted ...

Let me restate that violence against any person because of their faith or belief is completely unacceptable, and the Government have long been committed to promoting and protecting FORB for all. Although this right is clearly enshrined in international human rights law, the situation globally remains of grave concern. ...

Religious intolerance and persecution are often at the heart of foreign and development policy challenges. Where religious freedom or belief is under attack, human rights across the piece are often threatened too. ...

col 475WH ... we have been using the strength of our own global diplomatic network to encourage states to uphold their human rights obligations. ... I travel to no country without a very clear brief on the issues around any human rights challenges, specific or more broad. ...

On the multilateral point first, we work across the UN, Council of Europe, G7 and International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance to try to protect and promote this incredibly important human right. ...

We of course regularly raise situations of concern at the UN Human Rights Council. ...

col 476WH In recent months, we have actively engaged in UN discussions on the balance between freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, following incidents of Koran burnings in Europe. ...

col 477WH [Fiona Bruce] has asked whether a specific Minister in the House of Commons might take responsibility for freedom of religion or belief. In a bicameral Parliament, of

course, we have specific ministerial responsibilities that are split across both Houses. My noble friend Lord Ahmad established the FORB role prior to the Truro report, and I know that colleagues present agree that he does an incredibly good and passionate job as a proactive advocate for and a passionate believer in these principles; his work is now recognised and respected around the world. I also note my hon. Friend's intention to seek a private Member's Bill to make the special envoy role permanent. ...

col 478WH As a long-standing champion of human rights, the United Kingdom has a duty to promote and defend our values of equality, respect and democratic freedom at home and abroad, and I assure Members that this Government are doing just that. Through the channels available to us, we will continue to call out persecution and defend the right of freedom of religion or belief for all. Difficult and robust conversations happen at the highest levels every time Ministers travel, to ensure that the UK's commitments to FORB and tolerance are clearly understood. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-09-19/debates/C845845A-CAC0-4C2F-849F-BCB464FFAB3B/FreedomOfReligionAndBelief>

The Bishop of Truro's report, referred to above, can be read at

<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf>

The Analysis of the #RealSikh Influence Operation, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.info-res.org/post/revealed-real-sikh-influence-network-pushing-indian-nationalism>

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

The Pew Research Centre report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/11/29/physical-harassment-related-to-religion-occurred-in-more-than-two-thirds-of-countries-in-2020>

The House of Commons Library Briefing referred to above can be read at

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2023-0182/CDP-2023-0182.pdf>

The special rapporteur's report referred to above can be read at

<https://undocs.org/en/A/74/358>

The G20 communique referred to above can be read at

https://www.g20.org/content/dam/gtwenty/gtwenty_new/document/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf

UN resolution 318, referred to above, can be read at

<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/77/318>

The G7 communique referred to above can be read at

https://www.g7hiroshima.go.jp/documents/pdf/Leaders_Communique_01_en.pdf

House of Lords Written Answer

Religious Freedom

The Lord Bishop of Coventry [HL9768] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking, as Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, to ensure that the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Ministerial Conference in Prague this November is (1) informed by the experiences of affected communities, and (2) includes freedom of religion or belief experts and representatives from relevant civil society and faith-based organisations.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and Chair of the International Religious Freedom or Belief

Alliance (IRFBA), Fiona Bruce, is working with Vice Chair of IRFBA, Ambassador Rehak of the Czech Republic, to ensure the Conference in Prague in November is inclusive, well informed by affected communities and includes FoRB experts, representatives from civil society and faith-based organisations. As outlined in our Written Ministerial Statement following the 2022 Conference

[\[https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-07-15/hlws204\]](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-07-15/hlws204)

we continue to build partnerships with civil society focussed on key themes from the Conference, drawing on the convening power of the IRFBA to promote FoRB for all.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-09-04/hl9768>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

**** Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

Amendment paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/0325/amend/econactivity_rm_rep_0920.pdf

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186>

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>

House of Lords consideration of Commons amendments

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-09-19/debates/076ACAC5-EBD0-46ED-A8F4-755C0811968E/OnlineSafetyBill>

Nakba Commemoration Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3461>

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>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-protection-of-premises-draft-bill-overarching-documents>

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill

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

Universal Jurisdiction (Extension)

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

Scottish Parliament

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 2 days**

Drug Use in Ethnic Minority Groups Review (closing date 22 September 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/drug-use-in-ethnic-minority-groups/drug-use-in-ethnic-minority-groups-call-for-evidence>

A Human Rights Bill for Scotland (closing date 5 October 2023)

<https://consult.gov.scot/equality-and-human-rights/a-human-rights-bill-for-scotland-consultation/>

The future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales (closing date 26 October 2023)

<https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/>

Management of burial grounds, application for burial, exhumation, private burial and restoration of lairs: regulation in Scotland (closing date 17 November 2023)

<https://consult.gov.scot/burial-cremation/regulation-burial-scotland/>

Statutory inspection of burial authorities, cremation authorities and funeral directors (closing date 17 November 2023)

<https://consult.gov.scot/burial-cremation/statutory-inspection-burial-authorities/>

Funeral director licensing scheme for Scotland (closing date 17 November 2023)

<https://consult.gov.scot/burial-cremation/licensing-funeral-directors-scotland/>

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) [Northern Ireland] (closing date 24 November 2023)

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/consultations/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse-consultation>

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