



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Lords Debate

Online Safety Bill, Committee Stage

col 1700 **Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated):** ...I am slightly concerned about linguistic double-speak, or at least confusion. The whole Bill is being brought forward in a climate in which language is weaponised in a toxic minefield—a climate of, “You can’t say that”. More nerve-rackingly, words and ideas are seen as dangerous and interchangeable with violent acts, in a way that needs to be unpicked before we pass this legislation. Speakers can be cancelled for words deemed to threaten listeners’ safety—but not physical safety; the opinions are said to be unsafe. Opinions are treated as though they cause damage or harm as viscerally as physical aggression. ...

... all the time we have to ask, “Who will interpret what is dangerous? What do we mean by ‘dangerous’ or ‘harmful’?”. Surely a term such as “abusive”, which is used in the legislation, is open to wide interpretation. Dictionary definitions of “abusive” include words such as “rude”, “insulting” and “offensive”, and it is certainly subjective. We have to query what we mean by the terms when some commentators complain that they have been victims of online abuse, but when you check their timelines you notice that, actually, they have been subject just to angry, and sometimes justified, criticism. ...

col 1701 The same is true of the Bill’s use of the term “incites hatred”. The word “hatred” in 2023 is highly contentious in the public arena. Indeed, over the last decade Parliament has wrestled with criminal offences around the incitement of hatred, and safeguards were built into legislation in the past, including free speech clauses in controversial areas such as religion. However, it seems to me that in this Bill the word “hatred” is just free floating. A user who understands “incites hatred” to cover really malicious, nasty content might not realise how much other content could be filtered out by the filtering tool if it operates at a low threshold of understanding what inciting hatred is.

It is also the case that inciting hatred around protected characteristics is fraught as an issue offline, let alone online. There are huge rows about whether accusations of Islamophobia and inciting hatred of Muslims are sometimes used to avoid open debates on extreme Islamist views. For example, will images such as the cartoons in the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine be seen as inciting hatred by some, and will they get filtered out?

Similarly, some say that accusations of anti-Semitism—inciting hatred of Jewish people—are used to quell legitimate criticism of Israeli policy. ...

It is worth asking the Minister: who do the Government envisage will do the filtering? Do online filterers, let alone algorithms or machine learning, have the qualifications to establish what constitutes abuse or hatred? ... Rather than empowering users, will the Bill not empower a new staff team of filterers trained in their own company's equality, diversity and inclusion norms to use filtering tools at the lowest common denominator, leading to over-removal policies that err on the side of caution in order to comply with regulations? ...
col 1702 I completely oppose those amendments that promote a default setting. They are clearly advocating a censorious approach to legal speech. I rather liked an analogy that I heard the IEA's Matthew Lesh use recently when he said, "Imagine if, when you go to a bookshop, you have to ask the shop assistant to let you into the special room that contains harmful books". Of course, material is still accessible, but creating a barrier to accessing certain speech that is perhaps uncomfortable in terms of religion, race or gender also forces people to identify themselves. If you have to say, "Please can I go into the harmful speech section?", or go into the harmful section of the bookshop, immediately you label yourself as pro-dangerous or pro-harmful material.

If those advocating these provisions are so certain about the righteousness of knowing that this speech is problematic, it would be more honest to simply outlaw it. ...

Finally, it is damaging in a democracy to have a proliferation of things that are unsayable. As the Bill reflects, so much debate takes place online, so it seems our responsibility as legislators to encourage a diversity of views to circulate, rather than carelessly or inadvertently to narrow the range of what circulates. On previous groups we mentioned Germany's infamous legislation, brought in in 2017, which is now facing major opposition at home. Danish free-speech think tank Justitia notes that though "the German government's adoption of the NetzDG was a good faith initiative to curb hate online, the law has provided a blueprint for Internet censorship that is being used to target dissent and pluralism."

I fear that unless we are very careful this section will do the same.

col 1704 **The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** ... We are united, I think, in wanting to do all we can to make the online space feel safe and be safe for all. However, there is increasing evidence that people do not believe that it is. The DCMS's own *Public Attitudes to Digital Regulation* survey is concerning. The most recent data shows that the number of UK adults who do not feel safe and secure online increased from 38% in November/December 2021 to 45% in June/July 2022. ...

col 1718 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay):** ... The Government share concerns about users who experience disproportionate levels of abuse online or those who are more susceptible to suicide, self-harm or eating disorder content, but these amendments encroach on users' rights in two ways.

First, the amendments intend to make the decision on behalf of users about whether to have these features turned on. That is aimed especially at those who might not otherwise choose to use those features. The Government do not consider it appropriate to take that choice away from adults, who must be allowed to decide for themselves what legal content they see online. ...

Secondly, the amendments would amount to a government requirement to limit adults' access to legal content. That presents real concerns about freedom of expression, which the Government cannot accept. ...

col 1719 The Bill sets out that the user empowerment content tools must be offered to all adult users and must be easy to access ...

col 1721 **Lord Clement Jones (Liberal Democrat):** ... can [the Minister] confirm that it is perfectly valid to have a choice to lift the user empowerment tool, just as it is to impose it?

Choice would still be there ...

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: It would be, but we fear the chilling effect of having the choice imposed on people. ... one does not know what one has not encountered until one has engaged with the idea. At the age of 18, people are given the choice to decide what they encounter online. They are given the tools to ensure that they do not encounter it if they do not wish to do so. ... We have been very clear that the Bill has extra protections for people under the age of 18, and it preserves choice and freedom of expression online for adult users—young and old adults. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-05-09/debates/0FB2262B-A381-48C7-9FBB-D8186C72704C/OnlineSafetyBill#contribution-5F90236E-2A4C-476A-A7B4-03838CA241F8>

Public Attitudes to Digital Regulation, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-attitudes-to-digital-regulation-tracker-survey/public-attitudes-to-digital-regulation-tracker-survey>

House of Commons Written Answers

Schools: Antisemitism

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [182801] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to tackle antisemitism in schools.

Claire Coutinho: Antisemitism, as with all forms of bullying and hatred, is abhorrent and has no place in our schools. Under the Equality Act 2010, schools have a duty to take steps to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations across all protected characteristics, including religion. The department has published guidance for schools on how to comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010 here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>

The department is also making sure that all children in England learn about respectful relationships, in person and online, as part of mandatory relationships, sex and health education (RSHE). This includes content on the different types of bullying, the impact bullying has, the responsibility of bystanders, and how to get help. RSHE guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health>

The department is fully committed to remembering the Holocaust and supporting high-quality and rigorous Holocaust education. We believe that young people should be taught the history of the Holocaust to understand why and how it happened, which is why it is the only historic event that is compulsory within the national curriculum for history at key stage 3. The topic is one that also has relevance to and can be taught in other subjects such as citizenship, religious education and English.

The department is providing over £3 million of funding, between 10 August 2021 and 31 March 2024, to five anti-bullying organisations to support schools to tackle bullying. One grant recipient, The Anne Frank Trust, runs termly teacher training sessions which focus on a different form of prejudice at each meeting. The first one of these focuses on Antisemitism and helps to equip schools with the skills, resources and confidence to continue growing an anti-bullying culture within their school.

The department continues to publish information, guidance and support for teachers and school leaders on how to challenge radical views, including racist and discriminatory beliefs, on the Educate Against Hate website, which can be found here:

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/>

The department has also published Respectful School Communities, a self-review and signposting tool to support schools to develop a whole-school approach which promotes respect and discipline.

https://educateagainsthate.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/6.4953_DFE_Respectful-schools_signposting-tool_FINAL_Fillable_Client_Cop....pdf

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-26/182801>

The following three questions all received the same answer

Islamophobia

Afzal Khan (Labour) [182937] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what progress has been made on developing an official definition of Islamophobia.

Afzal Khan (Labour) [182938] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of establishing an official definition of Islamophobia.

Afzal Khan (Labour) [182939] To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what discussions he has had with Muslim communities on the potential merits of an official definition of Islamophobia.

Dehenna Davison: Anti-Muslim hatred is entirely abhorrent. Such hate has no place in our communities or society, which is why we have funded Tell MAMA since 2016 to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred.

As set out previously, the Government does not support taking forward work on an official definition of Islamophobia but instead is working to address anti-Muslim hatred and the unacceptable forms which that takes.

We are considering our approach to religious hatred more broadly, including anti-Muslim hatred, and will be announcing our next steps in due course.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-26/182937>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-26/182938>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-26/182939>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Asylum

Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op) [183258] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum applications were processed by her Department in the last 12 months; and how many and what proportion of these applications were made by Palestinians.

Asylum: Palestinians

Alex Sobel (Labour Co-op) [183258] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many and what proportion of applications for asylum made by Palestinian people were successful in the last 12 months.

Robert Jenrick: The Home Office publishes data on asylum in the '[Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release](#)'. Data on initial decisions made on asylum

applications by nationality can be found in table Asy_D02 of the '[asylum and resettlement detailed datasets](#)'. Information on how to use the datasets can be found in the 'Notes' page of the workbooks. The latest data relate to the year ending December 2022. Data for the year ending March 2023 will be published on 25 May 2023. Information on future Home Office statistical release dates can be found in the '[Research and statistics calendar](#)'.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-28/183258>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-28/183259>

Israel: Administration of Justice

Holly Lynch (Labour) [182889] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he held discussions with the Israeli Prime Minister on that country's proposed judicial reforms during the visit of the Prime Minister to the UK in March.

David Rutley: As set out in the Foreign Secretary's statement on 27 March, the UK welcomes the decision taken by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to pause legislation to reform Israel's judiciary. During his meeting with PM Netanyahu on 24 March in London, the Prime Minister made clear the importance of upholding the shared democratic values that underpin our relationship, including in relation to the proposed judicial reforms in Israel. The Foreign Secretary also raised judicial reform and the importance of seeking consensus on this sensitive issue, with Israel's Foreign Minister Cohen during his visit to London on 21 March. The UK enjoys a deep and historic relationship with Israel, and we continue to urge all parties to ensure that a robust system of checks and balances, and the independence of Israel's judiciary, are preserved.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-26/182889>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-statement-on-pause-to-judicial-reform-in-israel>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

43rd Universal Periodic Review: Statement on Israel: The UK's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, Ambassador Simon Manley, delivered a statement at Israel's UPR at the Human Rights Council

... Israel has taken positive steps since its last review, including decreasing the number of Palestinian children in military detention and granting more access permits to Palestinians. Israel is celebrating its 75th birthday, 75 years as a democratic state, with a thriving civil society - one of its great strengths. So, we encourage Israel to protect civil society organisations.

We recommend Israel:

- 1) Reverse its policy of settlement expansion in the OPTs, including in East Jerusalem, and the decision by the Knesset in March to allow re-settlement in four locations in the northern West Bank.
- 2) Cease the appropriation of private Palestinian lands and the demolition of Palestinian properties.
- 3) Provide a clear and transparent process for construction for Palestinians in 'area C' and in East Jerusalem.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/43rd-universal-periodic-review-statement-on-israel>

Lord (Tariq)Ahmad of Wimbledon Whilst the UK recognises Israel's right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks, the reports of civilians, including children, killed in recent Israeli airstrikes are tragic. All sides must exercise restraint.

<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1655988520517763107>

United Nations

Statement by UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, on the situation in the Gaza Strip

I am deeply alarmed by developments in Gaza after Israel launched a military operation this morning targeting members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement (PIJ). The Israeli airstrikes inside Gaza resulted in the killing of 13 Palestinians, including three members of PIJ, a doctor, five women and four children, and more than 20 injured. I condemn the deaths of civilians in the Israeli airstrikes. This is unacceptable. I urge all concerned to exercise maximum restraint and avoid an escalation. I remain fully engaged with all sides in an attempt to avoid a broader conflict with devastating consequences for all.

https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/statement_by_un_special_coordinator_wennesland_-_9_may_2023_0.pdf

Statement by UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, on the demolition of a Palestinian primary school in occupied West Bank

I am deeply disturbed by the 7 May demolition by Israeli authorities of a European Unionfunded Palestinian primary school for the children of Jubbet adh Dhib village, east of Bethlehem, in Area C of the occupied West Bank, directly affecting the education of at least 40 children.

The demolition followed an Israeli court order citing safety concerns in response to a petition by a settler organization. Currently, 58 schools, serving 6,500 children, face the threat of demolition due to a lack of building permits that are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

A child's right to education must be respected. I call on Israeli authorities to cease such demolitions and evictions which are illegal under international law, and to approve plans for Palestinian communities to build legally in Area C to address their development needs, including for schools.

As I reiterated at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) meeting in Brussels last week, such acts that negatively impact basic service delivery for Palestinians threaten stability and undermine the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, persistent drivers of conflict, including demolitions, breed a climate of mistrust and tension between Palestinians and Israelis and undermine the prospect of achieving a political solution.

https://unsco.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/statement_by_un_special_coordinator_wennesland_-_8_may_2023.pdf

Committee to Protect Journalists

Deadly Pattern: 20 journalists died by israeli military fire in 22 years. No one has been held accountable.

https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CPJ-Special-Report-May-2023_Deadly-Pattern.pdf

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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>

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/50997/documents/3369>

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/2023-05-09/debates/0FB2262B-A381-48C7-9FBB-D8186C72704C/OnlineSafetyBill>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-05-09/debates/3BA20677-E90E-490B-ACDB-C331C4BE9118/OnlineSafetyBill>

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/51005/documents/3374>

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

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

**** closes in 5 days**

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>

Charities tax compliance (closing date 20 July 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/charities-tax-compliance/consultation-charities-tax-compliance>

JPR 2023 Antisemitism in the UK Survey (closing date not stated)

<https://www.jpr.org.uk/panel/UKantisemitism2023> (UK except Scotland)

and

<https://bit.ly/3Vg7DDH> (Scotland)

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