



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 839 Lord Clement-Jones (Liberal Democrat): ... These loopholes risk enabling extremist publishers to take advantage of the overbroad “recognised news publisher” exemption and allow hatred and other online harms to spread on some of the most popular social media forums online—the newspaper comment sections. ...

col 840 Some of the most harmful online content is in newspaper comment sections, which are in fact social media forums themselves and are read by millions of readers every day. Hacked Off has found examples of misogyny, explicit anti-Semitic language, Holocaust denial and more. Women in public life are also the target ... Professor Corinne Fowler ... wrote that “unregulated comments beneath articles, including the Telegraph and The Times as well as the Daily Mail and the Express ... contained scores of suggestions about how to kill or injure me. Some were general ideas, such as hanging, but many were gender-specific, saying that I should be burnt at the stake like a witch ... without me knowing, my son (then 12 years old) read these reader comments. He became afraid for my safety. The comments were easily accessible: he googled ‘Corinne Fowler National Trust’ and scrolled below the articles. No child should have to deal with hate speech directed at a parent”. ...

The criteria to qualify as a “recognised news publisher” is different for broadcasters and other media. For broadcasters, outlets must be regulated by Ofcom. For non-broadcast media, outlets need only meet a list of vague criteria: have a standards code, which could say anything; have a complaints process, which could also say anything; have a UK office; have staff; and not be a sanctioned title. As a result, a host of extremist and disinformation publishing websites may qualify immediately, or with minor administrative changes, for this rather generous exemption. For example, conspiracy theorist and racist David Icke’s website could qualify with minor administrative changes. He would be free to propagate his dangerous and, in many cases, anti-Semitic conspiracies on social media. Heritage and Destiny, an openly racist website, would likewise be able to qualify with minor changes

and spread racial hatred on social media. Infowars could open up a UK office, qualify and spread harmful content on social media. ...

col 842 Lord Black of Brentwood (Conservative): ... If the Bill ceases to be the Online Safety Bill and becomes the state regulation of the press Bill, it will become enormously controversial not just here but internationally. ...

That is my third point: the enormous global ramifications of seeking to use novel online legislation to force state-backed regulation on the press. The Crime and Courts Act 2013 and the establishment of the royal charter were roundly condemned by international press freedom organisations worldwide—the very same press freedom organisations we all claim to support when talking about the safety of journalists or the way in which the press is controlled in authoritarian regimes. Those same organisations condemned it utterly and they would look on with incredulity and horror if this, the first brave piece of legislation in the world to tackle online safety, was corrupted in this way and in a manner which sent the wrong signals to undemocratic regimes worldwide that it is okay to censor the press in the name of making the platforms accountable. ...

The other general point is that this group of amendments flies in the face of the most fundamental Leveson recommendation. In his report, he stressed that it was essential that the system of self-regulation remained voluntary. What these proposals do is the antithesis of that. In effect, they hold a gun to the head of the industry and say, “Either you join a state-approved regulator, or you’re subject to the statutory control of Ofcom”. ...

... the vast majority of the press will not under any circumstances join a regulator which is authorised by a state body and underpinned by the threat of legislation. Even Sir Brian Leveson said that he recognised that this was a matter of principle. ...

col 845 Baroness Grey-Thompson (Crossbench): ... These forums would qualify as social media platforms under the Bill’s definition were it not for a special exemption in Clause 49. They have been found to host some of the most appalling and despicable content online. I will paraphrase some examples so as not to subject the Committee to the specific language used, but they include anti-Semitic slurs in comments appearing under articles covering a violent attack on a synagogue; Holocaust denial; and speculation that Covid was created and spread by a secretive global cabal of powerful individuals who control the world’s leaders like puppets. ...

Comment sections are in too many cases badly regulated and dangerous places for members of the public. The exemption for them is unwarranted. Specifically, it protects any social media platform where users make comments in response to what the Bill describes as “provider content”. In this case, that means comments posted in response to articles published by the newspaper. This is materially no different from user exchanges of any other kind and should be covered just the same. ...

col 847 Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated): ... It is part of a lively and vital public square to be free to debate and discuss articles in newspapers. ... the comment section in newspapers is a form of accountability of the press to readers and the audience. ...

What is more, one likely outcome of this amendment is that newspapers could shut down their comments sections. The cost of investing in proactive scanning or child safety technology would be prohibitively expensive, and I think that would be a great loss. ...

col 847 ... there is a danger that we have an impression of the British public as a hate-fuelled mob who, as soon as you let them speak, spew out anti-Semitism, misogyny and all the rest of it. As I constantly try to say throughout this Bill, the whole notion of hate is at least subjective and often quite complicated. ...

col 851 Baroness Gohir (Crossbench): ... A number of far-right websites already exist across the internet which are capable, with minimal reform, of meeting the requirements to qualify as recognised news publishers and benefit from the exemption. Some of these websites host content from known high-profile racists. These extreme websites feature anti-Semitism, hatred of women and hatred of Muslims. The Centre for Media Monitoring,

part of the Muslim Council of Britain, has criticised the Bill's media exemption. The threat of far-right and anti-Muslim websites arguing that they constitute a news publisher is not only inevitable but very dangerous. As news publishers, they would have the freedom to propagate fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories about Islam and Muslims.

col 852 The thought that UK-based racist outlets would be able to access this exception is horrific enough, but there is also a risk that extremist news websites currently based in the USA and elsewhere around the world will seek to relocate to Britain to benefit from the exemption in future. This is because while the exemption does not require publishers to abide by any specific set of standards, it does require publishers to have a UK office. Perversely, this creates an incentive for an extremist website based the US, for example, from where many of the internationally most popular racially hateful websites currently operate, to establish an office here in the UK. In doing so, it may then be able to post content under the terms of the exemption. Indeed, this exemption risks paving the way for a catastrophic scenario in which, on account of this exemption, the UK becomes less safe. ...

Anyone can be a target of hatred in a newspaper comment section, but they are most likely to have Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, racist and misogynistic content. Without the amendment, the Bill's provisions on the media will endanger those it is intended to protect. ...

col 853 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay):** ... is Majesty's Government are committed to defending the invaluable role of a free media. ...

We have included strong protections for news publishers' and journalistic content in the Bill, which extends to the exemption from the Bill's safety duties for users' comments and reviews on news publishers' sites. This reflects a wider exemption for comments and reviews on provider content more generally. ...

Below-the-line comments are crucial for enabling reader engagement with the news and encouraging public debate, as well as for the sustainability—and, as the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, put it, the accountability—of the news media. We do not consider it proportionate, necessary or compatible with our commitment to press freedom to subject these comment sections to oversight by Ofcom.

We recognise that there can sometimes be unpleasant or abusive below-the-line comments. We have carefully considered the risks of this exemption against the need to protect freedom of speech and media freedoms on matters of public interest. Although comment functions will not be subject to online regulation, I reassure the Members of the Committee who raised concerns about some of the comments which have attracted particular attention that sites hosting such comments can, in some circumstances, be held liable for any illegal content appearing on them, where they have actual knowledge of the content in question and fail to remove it expeditiously. ...

col 854 Clause 50 stipulates the clear criteria which publishers will have to meet to be considered a "recognised news publisher" and to benefit from the protections in the Bill. One of those criteria is for entities to have policies and procedures for handling and resolving complaints. ... We believe that the criteria set out in Clause 50 are already strong, and we have taken significant care to ensure that established news publishers are captured, while limiting the opportunity for bad actors to benefit. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-05-23/debates/76E93B6E-EE2A-4307-8FDB-3DF78F0526BF/OnlineSafetyBill>

The amendments under consideration above can be read at

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/51231/documents/3453>

House of Commons Library Briefing

Tackling Islamophobia

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2023-0113/CDP-2023-0113.pdf>

Welsh Government

Ethnicity and national identity (Annual Population Survey): 2004 to December 2022

Ethnicity Data

https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Equality-and-Diversity/Ethnicity?_ga=2.107477195.837656309.1685009149-106468379.1679401747

National Identity Data

https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Equality-and-Diversity/National-Identity?_ga=2.107477195.837656309.1685009149-106468379.1679401747

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Nick Maynard

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [185945] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on establishing a (a) safe and (b) fast route to the UK for Professor Nick Maynard.

Bijendra Patel

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [185946] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on establishing a (a) safe and (b) fast route to the UK for Mr Bijendran of Royal London Hospital.

David Rutley: We are monitoring the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza and welcome the current ceasefire brokered by Egypt. When the Foreign Secretary wrote to his Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen on 10 May, he thanked him for coordinating with the British Embassy in Tel Aviv and requested Israel's continued assistance to allow British nationals in Gaza who wish to return to the UK to do so. The individual in question left Gaza via the Erez crossing into Israel on 13 May, confirming their safety to UK officials on 15 May.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-19/185945>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-19/185946>

The following two questions both received the same answer

International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [185130] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of UK involvement in the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [185132] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has

made of the adequacy of the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace in encouraging people-to-people peacebuilding programs.

David Rutley: There is already a range of UK aid-funded development programming in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, outside of what the UK may do in the future with this fund, which works to preserve the prospect of a negotiated two-state solution. The UK is a key donor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), providing essential humanitarian support to Palestinian refugees across its five zones of operation. Our annual contribution to their programme budget helps UNRWA provide education to over 533,000 children a year (half of them girls), and access to health services for 3.5 million Palestinian refugees.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-15/185130>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-15/185132>

International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace: USA

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [185131] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, on what date he most recently discussed the International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace with his American counterparts.

David Rutley: The Foreign Secretary has regular discussions with his US counterpart about the Middle East Peace Process, most recently at the G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting in April. The UK Government remains in close contact with the US Government about the US Middle East Partnership for Peace Act and how existing peace-building projects and funding can better support the goals of this Act. We share the objective of advancing economic, social, and political connections, and peaceful co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians. We stand ready to collaborate and coordinate further, including regarding the Act's Advisory Board, as additional information about its plans and priorities become available.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-15/185131>

Israel: Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Paul Bristow (Conservative) [185429] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help ensure a ceasefire between Israel and Islamic Jihad lasts.

David Rutley: We continue to closely monitor the security situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). The Foreign Secretary said in his 14 May statement that the UK welcomes the announcement of this Egyptian-brokered ceasefire and will support efforts to promote dialogue and create a pathway towards sustainable peace. The UK has proscribed Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) as a terrorist entity since March 2001 and as such does not engage with members of its organisation. PIJ and other terrorist groups must cease all actions that are violent or provocative, or that put civilian lives at risk. The Foreign Secretary wrote to Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen on 10 May to reiterate the UK's support for Israel's right to self-defence and to encourage the facilitation of humanitarian access to Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-16/185429>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ceasefire-in-israel-and-gaza-foreign-secretary-statement>

Israel: Palestinians

Sarah Olney (Liberal Democrat) [185046] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israel counterparts on (a) the demolitions of homes and infrastructure on the West Bank,

(b) use of excessive force and potential attacks on healthcare personnel and facilities, (c) settlement expansion and (d) restrictions on freedom of movement for residents of the West Bank.

David Rutley: The UK Government strongly condemns all forms of violence towards healthcare workers, who should be able to go about their work without obstruction. The UK's position on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. Demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians. We urge Israel to halt its settlement expansion.

The UK has consistently urged the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to de-escalate the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Foreign Secretary made this point to Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen when he met with him in person on 21 March. The Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon also frequently engages with Israelis and Palestinians on these issues.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-15/185046>

West Bank: Schools

Paul Bristow (Conservative) [185430] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he is making representations to his Israeli counterpart on the demolition of schools in the West Bank.

David Rutley: The UK is clear that in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions and evictions are contrary to international humanitarian law. Our opposition to the demolition of Palestinian property is long-standing. The practice causes unnecessary suffering and is harmful to efforts to promote peace. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation. Most recently, on 7 May, The Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon wrote to the Israeli Ambassador to the UK, Tzipi Hotovely, to express the government's issues with the demolition of Jubbet Adh Dhib school. Lord Ahmad also urged the Israeli government to take all possible steps to halt the imminent demolition of Ein Samiya school and to uphold the right to education for all.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-16/185430>

Gaza: Israel

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [185910] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on reports of airstrikes targeting residential buildings in Gaza.

David Rutley: We continue to monitor the ongoing humanitarian situation in Gaza and welcome the recent ceasefire brokered by Egypt. All countries, including Israel, have a legitimate right to self-defence. The reports of civilian Palestinian casualties, including women and children, are alarming. It is vital that all security actions are proportionate, in line with international humanitarian law, and calibrated to avoid civilian casualties as much as possible. The Foreign Secretary made this clear to Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen when he wrote to him on 10 May.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-19/185910>

The following four questions all received the same answer

Gaza: Israel

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [185911] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the

implications for his policies of the impact of Israel's closure of crossings with Gaza on the (a) ability of Palestinian patients to travel to the West Bank and East Jerusalem to receive medical treatment and (b) entry of humanitarian relief supplies into Gaza.

Alex Cunningham (Labour) [185912] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department is taking steps to help ensure the safe passage of (a) local and (b) international (i) medical and (ii) humanitarian personnel through the Erez crossing during airstrike attacks on Gaza.

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [185943] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on reports that recent border closures have prevented 142 patients in Gaza from accessing urgent treatments and cancer treatments in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [185944] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on reports that recent border closures have prevented aid workers from leaving Gaza.

David Rutley: We urge Israel to allow access into and out of Gaza and the West Bank, in accordance with international humanitarian law, for humanitarian actors, reconstruction materials and those, including Palestinians, travelling for medical purposes. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv regularly raises the importance of this issue with the Israeli authorities. We strongly condemn all forms of violence and incitement to violence directed towards healthcare workers. The wounded and critically ill in Gaza and the West Bank should be able to access the urgent medical care they need. The UK Government welcomes any effort to cooperate between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, including in the healthcare sector. When the Foreign Secretary wrote to the Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen on 10 May, he asked him to facilitate humanitarian access to Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-19/185911>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-19/185912>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-19/185943>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-19/185944>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Surveillance

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL7714] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report by Amnesty International published on 2 May into the use of the Israeli military facial recognition system, Red Wolf, in mass surveillance and whether they support the call by Amnesty International for an end to mass and targeted surveillance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK has a regular dialogue with the Government of Israel on the conduct of its occupation of Palestinian territories. The UK respects the necessity of Israeli security measures as part of the occupation, but we continue to stress to the Israeli authorities that the impact of such security measures must not disproportionately impact the lives of ordinary Palestinians or their right to non-violent protest.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-09/hl7714>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/MDE1567012023ENGLISH.pdf>

Khader Adnan

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL7781] To ask His Majesty's Government further to the comments by Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 2 May, what representations they have made to the government of Israel on the circumstances surrounding the death of Khader Adnan on 2 May.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The death of a hunger striking prisoner while in Israeli custody is alarming. The UK condemns the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza targeting innocent civilians in Israel in retaliation and welcomes the announcement of a ceasefire between Israel and militant factions in Gaza, brokered by Egypt. The ceasefire must now be honoured to prevent the loss of further civilian life. The UK will support all efforts to promote dialogue and create a pathway towards sustainable peace.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-11/hl7781>

The comments referred to above can be read at

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/db230502.doc.htm>

Israel: Lebanon

The Marquess of Lothian (Conservative) [HL7783] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of any recent cross-border escalation of violence between Israel and militants in southern Lebanon; and whether they have made any representations to governments in that region to de-escalate any further violence in those countries.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK condemned the indiscriminate rocket attacks from southern Lebanon and Gaza and recognises Israel's right to self-defence. We urge all sides to maintain calm and avoid taking actions which make peace more difficult to achieve.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-11/hl7783>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories continues to deteriorate: UK statement at the Security Council

President, the security situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories has deteriorated further to the detriment of both Israelis and Palestinians.

In Gaza, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militant factions fired 1,748 rockets at Israel. Indiscriminate rockets from Gaza caused the needless deaths of an Israeli and 4 Gazans. The UK condemns unequivocally the indiscriminate fire of rockets against civilians and all forms of terrorism. The UK Foreign Secretary welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire between Israel and militant factions in Gaza, and is grateful for the support of Egypt, Qatar and the US. We urge all parties to honour the ceasefire and prevent further loss of life.

President, the UK supports Israel's right to self-defence. But Israeli conduct must always be in line with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, humanity, proportionality and military necessity. We were concerned by the reports of at least 12 civilian deaths, including 6 children, in Israeli strikes in Gaza.

This month, we have also seen further deaths in the West Bank, where Israeli security forces have killed 110 Palestinians this year, including militants and civilians. If killing continues at this rate, 2023 will be the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since UN records began in 2004. Israeli security forces must show restraint in their use of force and investigate civilian casualties. 19 Israelis, residents and tourists including Lucy, Maia and Rina Dee, have already been killed in terrorist attacks in 2023. The Palestinian Authority must also re-assert control over Area A and take steps to tackle terrorism.

President, a solution to this conflict won't be found until both Israel and the Palestinians

tackle inflammatory rhetoric and incitement, as they agreed in Sharm El Sheikh on 19 March. Yet only last week, we heard from President Abbas and Israeli participants in the Flag March in Jerusalem racist slogans and slurs. Such rhetoric and incitement, including by both Israeli and Palestinian political leaders undermines the cause of peace.

Israel must also tackle increasing settler violence and coercion which on Monday resulted in the forcible transfer of the Palestinian population from Ein Samiya and desist from settler expansion which is illegal under international law.

Finally President, the United Kingdom also strongly supports the historic Status Quo governing Jerusalem's holy sites and values the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's important role as custodian.

The UK remains firm in its belief that a negotiated two state solution, based on 1967 lines with Jerusalem as a shared capital, is the only way to ensure a lasting peace, security and prosperity between the two parties.

At the General Assembly committee meeting on voluntary contributions to UNRWA in June, it is vital that the international community puts the agency onto a sustainable footing to protect the delivery of critical services to millions of Palestinian refugees. UNRWA is crucial to stability throughout the region.

As the Foreign Secretary stated on 14 May, the UK will support all efforts to promote dialogue and create a pathway towards a just and sustainable peace. The first step on that pathway is clear: both sides must honour the commitments they made in good faith in Aqaba and Sharm El Sheikh.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-situation-in-israel-and-the-occupied-palestinian-territories-continues-to-deteriorate-uk-statement-at-the-security-council>

United Nations

Recent Deadly Escalation between Israeli Forces, Palestinian Armed Groups 'Another Reminder' of Volatile Situation, Special Coordinator Tells Security Council
Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process ... said that the recent deadly escalation between Israel and Palestinian armed factions in Gaza was yet another reminder of the volatile security situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. While the ceasefire is holding, both sides must engage in conflict mitigation to reset a trajectory out of the cycle of violence. As well, the acute financial and institutional challenges facing the Palestinian Authority must be addressed. ...

On 2 May, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader, Khader Adnan, died in an Israeli jail following an 86-day hunger strike, he continued, noting this led to the group and other armed factions in Gaza firing over 100 rockets towards Israel, and the Israeli Air Force responding with airstrikes against what it said were Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad targets in the Strip, killing one Palestinian and causing damage. Hostilities ended on 3 May, following intensive efforts by Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations. A week later, on 9 May, the Israeli Air Force carried out airstrikes in Gaza killing three senior members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad's military wing in their homes, as well as 10 civilians, including women and children. Over five days, Israel conducted 323 airstrikes against what it said were Palestinian Islamic Jihad military targets in Gaza, while Palestinian militants launched over 1,200 rockets and more than 250 mortars towards Israel, of which nearly 300 fell short within Gaza and more than 400 were intercepted by Israel's aerial defence system. ...

Israel authorities closed both crossings between Gaza and Israel, preventing the entry of food, medical supplies and fuel for the Gaza Power Plant. He called on Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, including taking precautions to spare civilians in the conduct of military operations. He also reiterated the Secretary-General's condemnation of the launching of indiscriminate rockets from Gaza towards Israel ...

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the level of violence remained high, he said, reporting that 17 Palestinians, including two children, were killed and 138 Palestinians, including two women and 23 children, were injured by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, search-and-arrest operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, while another 24 Palestinians, including two children, were injured by Israeli settlers or other civilians in shooting attacks, stone-throwing and other incidents. Meanwhile, 33 Israeli civilians, including four women, as well as four Israeli security forces personnel, were injured by Palestinians in shooting and ramming attacks, and other incidents. ...

Thousands of right-wing Israeli activists, including senior Government ministers, participated in the highly provocative annual “flag day” march through Jerusalem’s Old City, chanting racist slogans, including “Death to Arabs.” Calling such provocations and incitement unacceptable, he reiterated that the status quo at the holy sites must be respected. ...

Tania Hary, Executive Director, Gisha Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, said that Israel’s control persists — particularly regarding movement and access — over the Palestinian population registry determining where people can live, as well as over Gaza’s electricity supply, its communications networks and its air and sea spaces. Just a week and a half since a ceasefire agreement was reached after yet another escalation in the region, Gaza has returned to normal. However, she noted: “For Gaza, normal means Israeli drones buzzing overhead at all hours, and the familiar cycle of destruction, reconstruction, mourning and trauma.”

She detailed what systemic movement restrictions look like on the ground, stressing that closure means that people are likely to wait for weeks and even months to get a permit to go from Gaza to Jerusalem to reach life-saving medical treatment. ... “Closure means that if your mother in the West Bank is sick, you have to prove to the Israeli military that she is at risk of death in order to hope to get a permit that will only be valid 3-5 days at most,” ... The wounds that cannot be seen — the trauma, hopelessness, and helplessness — are the hardest to heal, she said, spotlighting that 80 per cent of children in Gaza suffer from emotional distress. Israel faces legitimate security challenges but movement restrictions are not in place for security needs alone. They drive political goals to pressure the population and maintain control over the West Bank. ...

“What gives me hope are the many young people in Gaza who dare to dream of a better future and know they deserve it, despite the leaders who are failing them,” she said, stressing that the struggle for freedom and dignity cannot be suppressed forever, “not with the highest walls or the strongest armies”. ...

Linda Thomas-Greenfield (United States) said that the question that must be asked today is what can be done to prevent future violence and better protect Israeli and Palestinian civilians. Diplomacy and engagement are central to these efforts, and she called on the parties to focus on implementing important commitments made in recent meetings and to refrain from escalatory actions. Such actions include racist statements and incitement, she said, recalling the recent comments by President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas equating Israel with Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels as a case in point. Such comments are a gross affront to victims and survivors of the Holocaust and are unacceptable during a time of rising antisemitic violence around the world. She also expressed concern over inflammatory rhetoric that accompanied an Israeli minister’s 21 May visit to Haram al-Sharif, underscoring that this holy place should not be used for political purposes and calling on all parties to respect the historic status quo. ...

Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom) ... urged all parties to honour the ceasefire and prevent the loss of further civilian life. While expressing support for Israel’s right to self-defence, she emphasized that Israeli conduct must always be in line with international humanitarian law. Further, she sounded the alarm over 12 civilian deaths, including 6 children, in Israeli strikes in Gaza, as well as further deaths in the West Bank, where Israeli

security forces have killed 110 Palestinians this year, including civilians. ... [\[click here to read this speech in full\]](#)

Vassily A. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) spotlighted the record pace of Israeli settlement activity, noting that 7,157 housing units have been approved in 2023 so far — double the amount from 2021 and 2022. Further, outposts are being legalized *ex post* — with concomitant expropriation of land and demolition of Palestinian homes — and arbitrary arrests are on the rise with over 2,000 detained since the start of 2023. ...

Nicolas de Rivière (France) condemned Israeli authorities' decision to authorize the establishment of settlements in the occupied West Bank. Such actions contravene commitments entered into by Israel at the Aqaba and Sharm el-Sheik meetings. He also voiced concern about the second visit of the Israeli Minister for National Security to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on 21 May, calling it “a provocation” and underscoring the need to preserve the status quo of holy sites in Jerusalem. ... The Council bears the responsibility of defending the two-State solution and ensuring that resolutions it adopted are upheld. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15293.doc.htm>

UNRWA

Annual Report 2022

https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/annual_report_2022_final_version_compressed.pdf

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Tunisia: Religious Freedom

Lord Jackson of Peterborough (Conservative) [HL7779] To ask His Majesty's Government what recent assessment they have made of freedom of religion and belief in Tunisia.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Tunisia's constitution guarantees the freedom for all to practice religious rites, on the condition that public security is not compromised. We engage with different faith groups to understand the challenges they may face. During my visit to Tunisia in June 2022, I [the Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon] visited Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious sites to understand the situation regarding freedom of religion or belief and to express UK support for respect and tolerance between communities. I made a statement following the terrorist attack on 9 May in Djerba near the El Ghriba Synagogue, commending the Tunisian authorities' response to the situation.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-11/hl7779>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1656337690906722312>

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Other Relevant Information

Office of the Chief Rabbi and Church of Scotland

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis: The Chief Rabbi thanked the Church of Scotland for their partnership today in a landmark address to their General Assembly following the joint publication of a Jewish-Christian Glossary.

Includes a short video extract

<https://twitter.com/chiefrabbi/status/1661447404820758528>

Chief Rabbi tells the General Assembly of journey towards healing through dialogue

The Chief Rabbi has told the General Assembly that working together with the Church of Scotland there was a determination to "engage in a process of healing through dialogue" whilst acknowledging that "relationships are sometimes difficult to sustain". ...

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis ... thanked all those who participated and contributed to their monumental work on a new Jewish-Christian Glossary describing the efforts to bring it to fruition as a sacred journey together.

He encouraged people across the Church of Scotland to make use of the Glossary, published after more than a year of work and discussions involving both Church of Scotland ministers and rabbis.

"Please do read the Glossary - so much was invested in every word of it. It is so informative, so important, let not there be another statement or declaration relating to...Judaism without consulting the document first," he said. ...

Work on the Glossary began following Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis's previous visit to the General Assembly after he had warned that a Church and Society Council report, *The Inheritance of Abraham?*, which was critical of Israel, had caused concern within the Jewish community and was putting a strain on inter-faith relations.

He said: "And the relationship between the Church of Scotland and the Jewish community, unfortunately, suffered a setback...with the publication of the *Inheritance of Abraham?* report, and as a result, there was a difficulty. There was a crisis. There was a challenge and some of you will recall my previous address to this august body at that time, but what did we do about it?

"We were determined to engage in a process of healing and we achieved that through dialogue." ...

"Because the most important ingredient of constructive dialogue is not what you say, but it's how you listen. We listened, you listened, and together, we restored a good relationship ... We've still got some way to go. We still got some work to do. There are still some painful issues, but we continue to engage with warmth and in friendship on this sacred journey because we cherish the value of unity and peace and we don't ever more want to find ourselves in a position of painful divisiveness. ...

The Chief Rabbi also highlighted that in an increasingly secular world it was important to work together and that whilst there will always be differences between the two faiths, constructive dialogue is essential in order to avoid "painful divisiveness".

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Right Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, warmly welcomed the speech stating "Chief Rabbi, friend, I have rarely heard such powerful inspiring words in this General Assembly. ...

Commissioners welcomed the Glossary following Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis's speech ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2023/articles/chief-rabbi-tells-the-general-assembly-of-journey-towards-healing-through-dialogue>

Information about "The Inheritance of Abraham?", referred to above, can be read at

https://www.scojec.org/news/2013/13v_cos/cos.html

Very Rev Dr Susan Brown Speech—Church of Scotland General Assembly 2023

It is good to talk. And it is good to listen.

It is even better to keep talking and to keep listening.

The idea behind creating a glossary was not to provide definitive answers, but to offer possible beginnings through conversations between two particular parties – the Church of Scotland and our Jewish counterparts in the UK. The hope was those beginnings might lead to a deepening of understanding of how the way the words we each use is understood by the other and every bit as importantly, by ourselves.

The conversations which form the basis of the glossary were one-to-one conversations. Which means that the resultant insights come from the perspective of those individuals, further bolstered by the thoughts of partners and friends from within and beyond both communities. It is doubtful any of us will find an exact match for our theology within them, but that's kind of the point. The conversations provide a starting place from which, others are encouraged to hold their own conversations ...

The greatest weight of the work involved in producing these beginnings ... was carried by Dan Bacall and Felicity Ginsburg in the Office of the Chief Rabbi and by our own Mirella Yandoli ...

This document exists to be built on. By you.

The invitation this glossary extends, is to continuing conversations: conversations in which you, where you are, can sit down with your Jewish neighbours to learn and understand more about each other ...

For both perspectives there will be things that are hard to hear, that need to be said. But there are also things that can help to inspire and encourage one another. This document does not make our two communities of one mind. That cannot be. But it does invite us to understand one another even in our disagreement and it invites us too, to thank God for God's people. ...

To read the full transcript see

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/109419/very-rev-dr-susan-brown-speech.pdf

A Jewish-Christian Glossary

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/108745/ocr23-01_a-jewish-christian-glossary_a4_v4.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>

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/2023-05-23/debates/76A94AD2-D2E4-414D-85AC-8B02635F6746/OnlineSafetyBill>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2023-05-23/debates/76E93B6E-EE2A-4307-8FDB-3DF78F0526BF/OnlineSafetyBill>

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/51336/documents/3482>

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

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

The UK's international counter-terrorism policy (closing date 12 June 2023)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3120/>

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>

**** Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill** (closing date 23 June 2023)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3146/>

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