



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Food: Labelling

Henry Smith (Conservative) [9496] To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will take steps to include method of slaughter as an option in his recent consultation on consumer products food labelling.

Mark Spencer: In 2021, Defra ran a call for evidence to gather data on the impacts of different types of labelling reform for animal welfare, including considerations around imports, production systems and method of slaughter. We received over 1,600 responses and a summary of these responses is available on GOV.UK.

As recently announced by the Secretary of State, we will soon be launching a consultation on clearer labelling. This will explore options for labels and the animal welfare standards behind them, including the period of life which should be covered by these standards.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9496>

The summary of responses referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1100605/animal-welfare-labelling-summary-of-responses.pdf

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Reforms to boost confidence in the BBC's impartiality and complaints system set out in Mid-Term Review

... Audiences will be given greater certainty that their complaints about BBC TV, radio and on demand content - including concerns about bias - are dealt with fairly, through greater scrutiny of its complaints process, which is to be made more independent from programme makers. A new legally binding responsibility on the BBC Board will require it to actively oversee the BBC's complaints process to assure audiences that their concerns are being fairly considered. ...

In a rapidly changing media landscape the BBC needs to adapt or risk losing the trust of the audiences it relies on. ...

These changes will better set up the BBC to ask difficult questions of itself, and make sure Ofcom can continue to hold the broadcaster to account. ...

The Mid-Term Review has concluded that the BBC's complaints ... allows licence fee payers to hold the BBC directly accountable.

However, impartiality continues to be an ongoing issue for audiences, with concerns about the broadcaster's objectivity making up the majority of complaints about the BBC's editorial content. The review highlights a lack of public confidence in the way the BBC currently handles complaints. ...

To help the BBC go further to tackle perceptions of bias, the review also recommends that the BBC publishes more information about the work it is doing to strengthen the impartiality of its editorial content, including to illustrate the impact it's having. ...

As a national broadcaster, the BBC has a duty in its Charter to accurately reflect, represent and serve diverse communities across the UK, both on and off the screen.

While the BBC has said it is committed to improving representation, the review recommends it considers how diversity of thought and opinion could be better reflected in its decision-making. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reforms-to-boost-confidence-in-the-bbcs-impartiality-and-complaints-system-set-out-in-mid-term-review>

The BBC Mid-Term Review

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65af9545fd784b0010e0c6dc/E02987480_CP_999_BBC_Mid-Term_Review_Web_Accessible_1.pdf

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Holocaust

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Holocaust Memorial Day reception 2024: Foreign Secretary's speech

... Today we honour the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust – humanity's darkest hour.

We reflect on subsequent genocides, in Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia and Iraq.

And we recommit to rid the world of the prejudice and hatred that persists today. ...

Let me begin by thanking those who work so hard to support this work, ...

... including the Holocaust Memorial Day and Holocaust Educational Trusts, who both do

There are lots of days in your life that you remember.

I remember the birth of our first child. I remember the death of our first child.

But there are two other days that I will never forget.

One was a winters day nine years ago where I had the privilege of visiting Auschwitz. It's an extraordinary thing to go through. And, of course, you are struck by this massive architecture of murder, these famous archways, the mechanics of deaths, the scale of murder.

But what really hits you is when you see those displays of the luggage, the suitcases piled high. The children's toys taken from the children before they were killed. The hair taken from those that went into the gas chamber.

These are things you never forget when you see them. And it's so important that children have the opportunity today to see first hand what this architecture of mass murder is all about. ...

But there is another day that I will never forget, and that was the attacks on 7 October last year.

Not long after the event, I stood in Kibbutz Be'eri.

The first thing that strikes me is what a place of peace it is. Built out of nothing in the desert, inhabited by people who went to make a life and a future for themselves and their families. But then you go house to house, and you can see the bullet holes in the walls. The blood on the floors. The cupboards where children hid before they were pulled out and murdered in front of their parents. The appalling death and destruction on what was, let's remember, the deadliest assault on Jewish people since the holocaust.

And since then, not only have those people had to live with that tragedy. Not only have they had to live with the fact that there are still 130 more hostages in Gaza whose fate we are so worried about and who we want to see released so badly.

But there has been this upsurge in antisemitism here in Britain as well as elsewhere.

So, in my view, it has never been more important to say so clearly that we stand with Jewish people. We stand with the state of Israel, We stand with their right to defend themselves as they go through this terrible ordeal with the legacy of the holocaust. And that's why it's so important we are gathered here today. ...

Many British diplomats saved lives in the face of hatred and tyranny.

I want to share with you one example.

From 1938, a brave team of Foreign Office and church officials in Vienna took huge risks ... provided travel documents and baptismal certificates for Jews who were desperate to cross Austria's borders to safety.

Reverends Hugh Grimes and Reverend Frederick Collard carried out hundreds of baptisms every day.

Officials led by Thomas Kendrick and George Berry worked around the clock to exploit every possible loophole to issue travel permits and passports. ...

Two members of this group – Kendrick and Collard – were harshly interrogated by the Nazis. The Jewish-born verger of Christ Church was sent to Auschwitz, where he died.

But thanks to the courage of some twenty-five individuals, tens of thousands of lives were saved.

Until recently, their devoted efforts were unknown.

But the FCDO were determined they should not be forgotten.

So last March, relatives of survivors joined us, faith groups and Lord Pickles, in unveiling a plaque at the British Embassy, opposite Christ Church. ...

British officials also played a role in that great rescue operation led by Jewish organisations 85 years ago.

That operation saved thousands of children from Nazi persecution in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia.

I'll never forget meeting one in Number 10 Downing Street when she showed me the little pocketbook that her father had written when she got off her train. It just said, 'be a good daughter to the country that gives you hope'. ...

But while many children found safety here, they paid a high price – the murder of their parents, who were not allowed to accompany them.

Freedom, for those children, was indeed fragile, and tinged with what must have been deep and abiding sadness. ...

These are once again dangerous and volatile times.

We and our partners must show strength and unity if we are to defend freedom.

In March, the UK assumes an important mantle, the Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

We will use this opportunity to explore the circumstances of the Holocaust ... and highlight the nature of societies that allowed mass murder to take place.

And crucially we want to emphasise that these things take place in plain sight. ...

Because with memory of the Holocaust soon to pass from our living history, we must never allow it to slip from our consciousness.

After the horrors of 7 October, we must renew our vow – never again. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/holocaust-memorial-day-reception-2024-foreign-secretarys-speech>

Welsh Senedd Written Answer

Holocaust Memorial Day

Andrew RT Davies (Conservative) [WQ90412] What plans does the Welsh Government have to mark Holocaust Memorial Day?

Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip: The Welsh Government works closely with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust to ensure that Holocaust Memorial Day is marked appropriately in Wales. I will be joining the First Minister at the Wales National Holocaust Memorial Day Ceremony on the 26th January that is jointly arranged by the Welsh Government and Cardiff Council.

<https://record.senedd.wales/WrittenQuestion/90412>

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Israel

See also “Holocaust Memorial Day reception 2024: Foreign Secretary’s speech” that is included in the Holocaust section above, and the Delegated Legislation Committee debate on “Iran (Sanctions) Regulations 2023” that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: International Law

Mark Hendrick (Labour Co-op) [9426] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Israel on the importance of upholding international law.

Andrew Mitchell: We support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law and there must be a reduction in civilian casualties. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. The Foreign Secretary has raised these issues with his Israeli counterparts, including with the Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz and Ron Dermer, the Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9426>

Israel: Palestinians

Claudia Webbe (Independent) [8247] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether his Department has made an assessment of the accuracy of allegations of the use of white phosphorus use in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Andrew Mitchell: We support Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas, but it must comply with International Humanitarian Law; we keep under continuous review whether they are abiding by their obligations. We are deeply concerned about the impact on the civilian population in Gaza and recognise that too many civilians have been killed. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes. We continue to call for IHL to be respected and civilians to be protected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-05/8247>

Gaza: Hospitals

Desmond Swayne (Conservative) [9977] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, with reference to the oral contribution of the Second Church Estates Commissioner on 11 January 2023, Official Report, column 443, whether his Department has sought information on the (a) whereabouts and (b) wellbeing of staff from the Anglican al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza who were taken by the Israeli Defence Force.

Andrew Mitchell: It is the longstanding policy of successive UK Governments that we do not comment on individual cases. However, we are concerned over reports about Israeli detention practices. The Government is clear that administrative detention should be used only where it is justified in accordance with international law. Those under detention should either be charged or released. The UK is committed to working with Israel to secure improvements in its detention practices and repeatedly calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law. The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/9977>

The oral contribution referred to above can be read at

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-11/debates/E3C4B352-0258-4C76-AD63-531F8FE094C4/AnglicanHospitalInGaza>

West Bank: Violence

Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op) [10143] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, what assessment he has made of the of the potential impact of trends in the level of settler violence in the West Bank on the local population.

Andrew Mitchell: The Government is concerned at the high numbers of Palestinians killed in the West Bank, and we continue to be clear that extremist settlers, by targeting and killing Palestinian civilians, are undermining security and stability. We have urged Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable. It is critical that Israel acts to reduce tensions in the West Bank.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/10143>

Houthis: Shipping

Kenny MacAskill (Alba) [9661] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which UK flagged vessels have been attacked by the Houthis since 7 October 2023.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: Since 19 November, the Houthis have carried out a series

of dangerous and destabilising attacks against commercial shipping in the Red Sea. Contrary to their claims, the Houthis have been targeting shipping with no connection to Israel, including British-flagged vessels.

As of 17 January, the Joint Maritime Security Centre report that there have been 36 Houthi related incidents (Drone/Missile attack or near miss, Seizure, UAS Harassment, Suspicious Approach) in the Red Sea affecting 11 separate flag states. Vessels with British links were Galaxy Leader; Unity Explorer; Al Marrouna; Number 9; Ardmore Explorer; Navig8 Montiel; Green Trader; CMA CGM Tage and one Red Ensign Group (REG-flagged vessel): Swan Atlantic.

HMS Diamond was first targeted by a Houthi attack on 9 January.

We continue to work with our allies and partners to safeguard maritime security and navigation rights and freedoms in the Red Sea.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-15/9661>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Jeremy Corbyn (Independent) [312] Dr Ofer Cassif – That this House acknowledges the plight of Dr Ofer Cassif, Member of Israeli Knesset of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash) who currently faces unconstitutional expulsion from the Israeli Knesset on the grounds of supporting armed struggle against the state following his signature on a petition supporting South Africa's appeal to the International Court of Justice (ICJ); recognises that Dr Cassif simply insists upon an end to the bloodshed, death and destruction in Gaza and calls for the release of all hostages, as well as for a lasting just peace in the interest of both Israelis and Palestinians; applauds the courage it takes for Israelis to express sympathy and solidarity with innocent Palestinian victims and speak out against their Government's actions particularly at this time amidst repression and harassment; and furthermore supports all calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61800>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UK, US and Australia sanction key figures in Hamas's financial network

... The UK, US and Australia have imposed coordinated sanctions on Hamas today to disrupt the terrorist group's financial networks.

Five key figures and an entity involved in the leadership and financial networks of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are the subject of the UK's new sanctions, which will help to cut off the flow of funding that supports these terrorist groups, including from Iran. Today's announcement is the third round of sanctions imposed on Hamas and PIJ by the UK following the 7 October attacks on Israel, which build on existing sanctions against the groups.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: These sanctions send a clear message to Hamas – the UK and our partners are committed to ensuring there is no hiding place for those financing terrorist activities.

To reach a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza, Hamas can no longer be in power and able to threaten Israel. By disrupting the financial networks which sustain Hamas' operation, including from Iran, these sanctions support that crucial aim.

The UK is committed to working with partners to tackle Iran's destabilising activities in the Middle East, including its long-term support to terrorist and militant groups. Today's sanctions target Zuheir Shamlakh, a man with an infamous reputation as Hamas's 'main money changer' since 2019, and a key figure in the group's shift towards cryptocurrencies. Shamlakh exploited digital currencies and existing systems of informal money transfers to

move large sums of money from Iran to Hamas ahead of the tragic 7 October attacks. ... Those now subject to UK asset freezes and targeted arms embargoes include:

- Zuheir Shamlakh: a key Hamas financier ...
- Ahmed Sharif Abdallah Odeh: a key operator in Hamas's financial network who previously ran their international portfolio of companies
- Ismail Barhoum: a member of Hamas's Political Bureau in Gaza and the group's governing Shura Council
- Hassan Al-Wardian: a senior leader of Hamas in the Bethlehem/West Bank region
- Jamil Yusuf Ahmad Aliyan: a senior PIJ official and representative based in Gaza

The individuals are also subject to a travel ban, and will be unable to enter the UK.

The UK, along with our G7 partners, has committed to take action to deny Hamas the ability to raise and use funds to carry out atrocities. The [EU announced on Friday 19 January 2024 a new EU sanctions regime against Hamas](#) and sanctioned 6 targets which had previously been sanctioned by the UK and US.

This is the third tranche of sanctions the UK has imposed against Hamas and its associates since 7 October ...

The Foreign Secretary continues to work with allies and partners to find a peaceful resolution to this conflict. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-sanction-key-figures-in-hamass-financial-network>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Delegated Legislation Committee

Iran (Sanctions) Regulations 2023

col 3 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty): I beg to move, That the Committee has considered the Iran (Sanctions) Regulations 2023 (S.I., 2023, No. 1314).

This statutory instrument contains measures to deter the Government of Iran, and groups backed by Iran, from conducting hostile activity against the UK and our partners. ...

The Iranian regime poses a clear threat to the UK and our partners, with hostile acts ranging from assassination plots to significant support for armed groups. The new legislation provides sanctions powers to respond to that appalling behaviour. ... Since January 2022, the UK has identified at least 15 threats emanating from Iran towards the lives of UK-based individuals. ... It is not only that; Iran continues to destabilise the middle east through its development and use of weapons, along with support for groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis.

Our priority is the safety and security of the UK, the people who live here, and international partners. That is why we have taken action, using this legislation, to sanction the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, Esmail Qaani, and other senior IRGC figures involved in Iran's long-term support for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

John Spellar (Labour): The Minister mentions individuals with the revolutionary guard, but what about the revolutionary guard itself?

Leo Docherty: ... the IRGC is sanctioned as an entity. There has been recent discussion about proscription, but that is different from sanctioning. ...

John Spellar: But should we not be proscribing the IRGC, as in the end we had to with Hezbollah?

Leo Docherty: ... that that is a matter for the Home Secretary. It would be improper for a Foreign Office Minister to speculate or comment on it ...

col 4 John Spellar: ... Is there not an understanding that the Home Office and successive Home Secretaries have wanted to proscribe the IRGC against resistance from the Foreign Office?

Leo Docherty: It would be fruitless for this Foreign Office Minister to give any comment, against long-standing convention from the Dispatch Box, with regard to proscription or otherwise. ...

We will use this legislation as a key tool within a broader diplomatic approach aimed at deterring Iran. Sanctions are particularly effective when imposed alongside international partners and combined with other diplomatic tools. ...

I turn now to trade measures, because that is the other substantive addition made by this legislation. ...

This legislation imposes new restrictions on the Iranian regime's drone programme ... The trade restrictions strengthen our existing export controls on drone components, ensuring that no UK business or person, wherever they are in the world, can facilitate the trade of those items.

This legislation also maintains existing trade measures on goods and technology that might be used for internal repression ...

col 5 Since October 2022, we have sanctioned 95 individuals and entities responsible for violating human rights in Iran. ...

The new regulations demonstrate our determination to target those responsible for Iran's malign activity, and they maintain our commitment to international human rights law ...

Wayne David (Labour): ... During the past 18 months or so, we have seen a significant increase in Iran's reprehensible behaviour at home and abroad. ...

Across the middle east, of course, we have seen an increase in Iranian-sponsored terrorism. We all understand that Iran has close links to Hamas, proxies in Yemen who are acting against international shipping, and close links to Hezbollah, which is a very real threat to the north of Israel; and, as we all know, Iran has been—and is—supplying drones to Russia for use in Ukraine. ...

... if there are those who seek to evade the sanctions, can the Minister explain the severity of the consequences? Moreover, he mentioned that a significant thing about the regulations is that they take into account what is being done abroad. How exactly will the assessment be made before the sanctions are introduced in this country against Iranians? Has the Minister given further consideration to proscribing the IRGC, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley mentioned? ...

col 6 Theresa Villiers (Conservative): ... We can have a debate about the effectiveness of sanctions and the difference they make, but above all they show that we are trying to take a moral stand against the theocratic regime in Tehran. ...

We should all back the regulations. In fact, I think there is a case for the Government to go further and snap back some of the sanctions that were lifted as a result of signing the Iran nuclear deal. Like others, I reiterate the appeal that I have made in this House for several years now that we should also proscribe the IRGC. ...

col 7 Leo Docherty: ... we will use our active diplomacy and global intelligence networks, alongside our work with partners and friends around the world, to judge who might be subject to the new sanctions. ...

We will ensure, particularly when it comes to evasion, that third countries are not exposed against their will to proper sanctions being applied. ... IRGC proscription ... is clearly out of scope in this debate, but ... we will continue to review our approach because all our sanctions regimes are iterative. ...

John Spellar: Will the Government also take into account intelligence on the international criminal aspects? There is significant involvement of Hezbollah and other parts of the

Iranian nexus in organised crime ...

col / 8 Leo Docherty: ... I can answer in the affirmative; we will take note of that as we review our sanctions approach.

The regulations will allow us to hold Iran to account for a broad range of malign activity, including the planning or conducting of attacks, assassinations, kidnap, sabotage of assets and attacks against shipping, of which we have seen a great deal in recent days and weeks. We have long condemned Iranian support for groups including Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Houthis. We are seeing again at the moment the way that such activity damages not just middle eastern security but global security and prosperity. ...

Giles Watling (Conservative): ... Iran is hiring hitmen across the world to target individuals in foreign states, so it is more than just states that Iran is affecting with the Houthis in Yemen and Hamas in Gaza and elsewhere; we must take care to proscribe the individuals, too.

Leo Docherty: ... Our sanctions against Iran account for a significant proportion of our sanctions work. The measures introduced by these regulations will be a useful tool in deterring and responding to future hostile activity against the UK and our partners. ...

Question put and agreed to.

To read the full transcript wee

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-22/debates/01da07c8-7cb5-4199-aead-4de0411038d0/Iran\(Sanctions\)Regulations2023](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-22/debates/01da07c8-7cb5-4199-aead-4de0411038d0/Iran(Sanctions)Regulations2023)

Iran (Sanctions) Regulations 2023 (S.I., 2023, No. 1314)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2023/1314/contents/made>

House of Commons Library Briefing

Religious persecution and the World Watch List 2024

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2024-0017/CDP-2024-0017.pdf>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3567>

Disestablishment of the Church of England Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3539>

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill

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

The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 [Draft]

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348253191/contents>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3535>

Genocide (Prevention and Response) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3521>

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3564>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3596>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

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

Strategic Equality Plan 2024 to 2028: proposed principles of approach and objectives [Welsh Government] (closing date 12 February 2024)

<https://www.gov.wales/strategic-equality-plan-2024-2028-proposed-principles-approach-and-objectives>

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Enhanced Dataset [England] (closing date 5 March 2024)

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/clinical-audits-and-registries/female-genital-mutilation-datasets/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-enhanced-dataset-overview-of-2024-consultation>

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