



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

Home Office

James Cleverly The recent surge in antisemitism is beyond contempt. No one should be subject to hatred because of who they are. Our increased funding for @CST_UK has offered additional protective security to over 480 Jewish community locations. We will always support our Jewish communities. [plus link to the CST Antisemitic Incident Report 2023]

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1758102245189525843>

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

Schools: Racism, Sectarianism and Homophobia

Daniel McCrossan (SDLP) [AQW 5510/22-27] To ask the Minister of Education why his Department and the Education Authority do not keep central records to detail the number of reported incidents of racism, sectarianism and homophobia in schools.

The Minister of Education: The Addressing Bullying in Schools Northern Ireland Act 2016, which came into effect in 2021, requires schools to record incidents or alleged incidents of bullying type behaviour, their motivation and their outcome. Each school's Board of Governors has responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Act in their school. The legislation does not include the requirement for schools to share the data that they record with the Department.

The Act referred to above can be read at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/25/enacted>

Community Security Trust (CST)

Antisemitic Incidents Report 2023

CST's *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2023* ... shows 4,103 instances of anti-Jewish hate recorded across the UK in 2023. This is the highest annual total ever reported to CST. It is a 147% rise from the 1,662 antisemitic incidents in 2022, and 81% higher than the previous yearly record of 2,261 incidents, reported in 2021. CST recorded 1,684 antisemitic incidents in 2020, and 1,813 in 2019.

A further 2,185 potential incidents were reported to CST that are not included among this report's statistics as, upon investigation, they were not deemed to be antisemitic. Many of these incidents involve suspicious activity or possible hostile reconnaissance at Jewish locations, criminal activity affecting Jewish people and buildings, and anti-Israel activity that did not include antisemitic language, motivation or targeting.

The record total of anti-Jewish hate incidents in 2023 is a result of the unparalleled volume of antisemitism perpetrated following the Hamas terror attack on Israel on 7 October. Of the 4,103 instances of anti-Jewish hate reported, 2,699 (66%) occurred on or after 7 October. This figure alone exceeds any previous annual antisemitic incident total recorded by CST, and marks an increase of 589% from the 392 instances of antisemitism reported to CST over the same time period in 2022. ...

The first incident inspired by Hamas' attack was reported to CST at 12:55pm on 7 October, when a vehicle drove past a synagogue in Hertfordshire with a Palestinian flag attached, windows wound down and an occupant shaking their fist in the air towards the synagogue where congregants were celebrating the festival of Simchat Torah. CST recorded 31 cases of anti-Jewish hate on that day, compared to ten the day before. Daily totals increased over the coming days, peaking on 11 October with 80 antisemitic incidents – the highest number ever reported to CST on a single day. In the week following 7 October, CST recorded 416 anti-Jewish hate incidents, higher than any subsequent week. It indicates that it was celebration of Hamas' attack, rather than anger towards Israel's military response in Gaza, that prompted the unprecedented levels of antisemitism across the country. ...

The most common form of anti-Jewish discourse used in antisemitic incidents throughout the year either referenced or was linked to Israel, Palestine, the Hamas terror attack, or the subsequent war. ...

There were 955 antisemitic incidents in 2023 in which the offender made reference to Hitler, the Nazis, or the Holocaust; an increase of 104% from the 469 such incidents reported in 2022, when it was the most common type of discourse. Among these 955 incidents, there were 70 cases of Holocaust denial and 184 of Holocaust celebration. One hundred and eighteen (64%) of these 184 incidents that glorified the Holocaust occurred after 7 October and followed one of two distinctive trends. Perpetrators either glorified Hamas' act of terror as a repeat of the Nazis extermination of the Jews during the Holocaust, or lamented Hitler's failure to eliminate world Jewry entirely, in the context of Israel's existence and response to the Hamas attack. ...

In 2023, there were 87 antisemitic incidents recorded at Jewish schools. An additional 111 incidents involved Jewish schoolchildren away from school, often on their way to or from home. One hundred and twenty-seven incidents involved Jewish schoolchildren or staff at non-faith schools. This constitutes a record annual total of 325 antisemitic incidents affecting people and property in the school sector, an increase of 232% from 98 such incidents recorded in 2022. Of these, 229 (70%) took place after 7 October. ...

In 2023, CST recorded 182 antisemitic incidents in which the victims or offenders were students or academics, or which involved student unions, societies or other representative bodies. It is an increase of 203% from the 60 such incidents recorded in 2022. ...

CST recorded 1,282 cases of online antisemitism in 2023, more than in any previous year, and a 257% increase from the 359 online incidents reported in 2022. ...

In 2023, 2,410 antisemitic incidents were reported to have taken place in Greater London, rising by 161% from 2022's total of 923 London-based incidents. CST recorded 555 antisemitic incidents in Greater Manchester, an increase of 163% from the 211 incidents in the corresponding area in 2022. ...

Apart from Greater London and Greater Manchester, the police regions with the highest levels of reported antisemitism in 2023 were Hertfordshire with 112 incidents, Essex with 75, West Yorkshire with 75, Scotland with 68, and West Midlands with 63. For the first time ever, antisemitic incidents were recorded in every single police region in the UK.

To read the full press release see

<https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2024/02/15/antisemitic-incidents-report-2023>

Antisemitic Incidents Report 2023

https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answer

Gaza: Israel

Stephen Morgan (Labour) [13349] To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, whether he has had recent discussions with his Israeli counterpart on Israel's political objectives in Gaza.

Andrew Mitchell: In recent weeks the Foreign Secretary has reiterated to Prime Minister Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Katz and other senior politicians the UK's call for an immediate pause to get aid in and hostages out and then progress towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire, without a return to destruction, fighting and loss of life. Vital steps include the release of all Israeli hostages, the formation of a new Palestinian Government for the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by an international support package, removing Hamas's capacity to launch attacks against Israel, Hamas no longer being in charge of Gaza and a political horizon which provides a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution. We need to generate momentum now towards a permanent peace.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-06/13349>

House of Lords Written Answers

Gaza: Armed Conflict

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger (Conservative) [HL2074] To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have held with the government of Israel regarding the protection of civilians during the Gaza conflict.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have reiterated the vital steps needed for a sustainable, permanent ceasefire in their contacts with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other senior Israeli political leaders,

including during the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel on 24 January. There must be a reduction in civilian casualties. All parties must act within International Humanitarian Law. We want to see Israel take greater care to limit its operations to military targets and avoid harming civilians and destroying homes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2074>

UNRWA

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL2083] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they intend to call for an immediate independent investigation into the killing of 150 staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East since 7 October and suspend all trade with Israel until that investigation is complete.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The safety of humanitarian personnel and healthcare workers in Gaza is critical to enable aid to reach those who need it most. We regularly review advice about Israel's capability and commitment to International Humanitarian Law and we act in accordance with that advice. The Foreign Secretary underlined the need for Israel to take all possible measures to ensure the safety of aid and medical personnel, as well as that of medical facilities, during his visit to Israel on 24 January. Israel must ensure effective deconfliction in Gaza, ensure there are effective systems to guarantee the safety of aid convoys and humanitarian operations, and ensure the UN has the people, vehicles, equipment and fuel to distribute aid safely across Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2083>

The following two questions both received the same answer

UNRWA: Finance

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL2081] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact on the people of Gaza of the decision to suspend the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Baroness Janke (Liberal Democrat) [HL2082] To ask His Majesty's Government how they expect the additional humanitarian aid for Gaza that they have called for can be distributed in light of the suspension of the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is appalled by allegations that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) staff were involved in the 7 October attack against Israel, a heinous act of terrorism that the UK Government has repeatedly condemned. The UK is pausing any future funding of UNRWA whilst we review these concerning allegations.

However, we remain committed to getting humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza who desperately need it, and our decision to pause future funding to UNRWA has no impact on the UK's contribution to the humanitarian response. Our commitment to trebling aid to Gaza still stands and we are getting on with aid delivery through funding multiple implementing partners including other UN agencies and international and UK NGOs. This support is helping people in Gaza get food, water, shelter and medicines. The UK is providing £60 million in humanitarian assistance to support partners including the British Red Cross, UNICEF, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) to respond to critical food, fuel, water, health, shelter and security needs in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2081>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2082>

Israel: Palestinians

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2004] To ask His Majesty's Government what additional resources they plan to commit to support civil society organisations in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories that are working cross-communally for peace and reconciliation.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK's position is clear: we are committed to making progress towards a two-state solution that guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people. Since 7 October, we have announced £60 million of aid to trusted partners which will go towards helping Palestinian civilians.

Development programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) work to preserve the prospect of a negotiated two-state solution and to improve the lives of Palestinians throughout the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, in line with the UK's longstanding position. Through our Empowering Palestinian Institutions and Civil Society (EPICS) programme, we have an accountable grant with AMAN (the Coalition for Integrity and Accountability), which seeks to combat corruption and promote integrity, transparency and accountability in Palestinian society. It incorporates a number of civil society organizations working in the field of democracy, human rights and good governance.

The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) OPTs-Israel Programme also supports Tech 2 Peace, I'lam - Arab Centre for Media Freedom, Physicians for Human Rights Israel, and Project Rozana which work to support engagement and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, building stronger constituencies and prospects for peace. We also support local organisations such as COMET-ME who work to keep Palestinians on their land in Area C of the West Bank, protecting the viability of a two-state solution.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2104>

Israel: Palestinians

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2006] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel to ease its restrictions on the free movement of Palestinian people within the West Bank and from the West Bank to Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We expect Israel to fulfil its obligations as an occupying power, and we are concerned by the restrictions on the free movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. In our engagements with Israel, we have stressed to them the damage the restrictions on movement, access, and trade are doing to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/hl2006>

Israel: Palestinians

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2007] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of travel restrictions, applied by the government of Israel on the free movement of Palestinian people within the West Bank and from the West Bank to Israel, on the economy of the West Bank; and what additional financial assistance, if any, they plan to provide to mitigate its effects.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We expect Israel to fulfil its obligations as an occupying power, and we are concerned by the restrictions on the free movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. In our engagements with Israel, we have stressed to them the damage the restrictions on movement, access, and trade are doing to the living standards of ordinary Palestinians.

UK economic development programming works with the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel to help address the main constraints to growth, like water,

energy and trade. Our work on economic development across the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) seeks to contribute towards maintaining the viability of a peaceful, negotiated two-state solution by supporting inclusive growth.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-29/hl2007>

Palestinians: Curriculum

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2007] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of efforts by the government of Israel to reform the curriculum of Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We regard East Jerusalem as part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and under Israeli military occupation. We expect Israel to fulfil its obligations as the Occupying Power.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2105>

Jerusalem: Christianity

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2006] To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have held with the government of Israel regarding the latter's plans to create a national park on the Mount of Olives; and what assessment they have made of the impact of these proposals on the Christian holy sites.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We recognise that Jerusalem holds particular significance for many groups around the globe, especially the three Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. We are committed to the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) for all and an advocate for the integrity of culturally important areas to be respected. A final determination of the status of Jerusalem should be sought as part of a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. It must ensure Jerusalem is a shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states, with access and the religious rights of all peoples respected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2106>

Jerusalem: Cultural Heritage

The Lord Bishop of Southwark [HL2103] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have made representations to the government of Israel concerning the land dispute at Cows' Garden in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; and if so, what the outcomes of those representations were.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: British officials met Armenian Community leader Hagop Djernazian in January 2024. The UK is monitoring the situation and is clear on the need to avoid any further rise in tensions. The UK's position on the status of Jerusalem is clear and long-standing: it should be determined in a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and Jerusalem should ultimately be the shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states. The UK is a strong supporter of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and an advocate for the integrity of culturally important areas to be respected. The UK continues to take a strong stance against settler violence and urges Israel to take stronger action to stop settler violence and hold the perpetrators accountable.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-31/hl2103>

Downing Street

PM call with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel

... He reaffirmed the UK's continued support for Israel's right to defend its people against Hamas' terror and ensure its long-term security.

The Prime Minister said the UK was deeply concerned about the loss of civilian life in Gaza

and the potentially devastating humanitarian impact of a military incursion into Rafah. He reiterated that the immediate priority must be negotiating a humanitarian pause to allow the safe release of hostages and to facilitate considerably more aid going to Gaza, leading to a longer-term sustainable ceasefire. For there to be lasting peace, Israel's security must be assured.

The Prime Minister highlighted the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and urged Israel to fully open the Kerem Shalom crossing and allow the maritime delivery of international aid through Ashdod port, which the UK stood ready to support on.

He noted the importance of continuing to abide by International Humanitarian Law and protecting civilian infrastructure like hospitals and shelters. The Prime Minister said more must be done to ease restrictions on humanitarian supplies and ensure the UN and aid agencies can reach civilians in need throughout Gaza.

The Prime Minister updated on his recent meeting with the families of British hostages held by Hamas and they discussed urgent ongoing efforts to bring hostages safely home, as well as steps to ensure any remaining British nationals who wish to leave Gaza are able to do so.

Turning to wider issues, the Prime Minister said it was vital to avoid inflaming tensions and undermining security in the West Bank. In the longer term, the UK continued to believe a viable two state solution was the best means to achieve lasting peace and stability for both Israelis and Palestinians. They agreed that Hamas can have no role in the future governance of Gaza.

The leaders also discussed regional issues, and the Prime Minister set out how the UK is supporting efforts to de-escalate the situation on Israel's northern border with Lebanon and avoid further conflict or threats to Israeli citizens.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-prime-minister-netanyahu-of-israel-15-february-2024>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Lord (Tariq)Ahmad of Wimbledon Israel's demolition yesterday of Palestinian activist Fakhri Abu Diab's home in Silwan, East Jerusalem, is unacceptable. I condemn this and all demolitions. Israel must halt this policy now.

<https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1758059748581064805>

Scottish Parliament Motions

Jackie Dunbar (SNP) [S6M-12152] **Immediate Ceasefire in Gaza** – That the Parliament calls for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12152>

Ivan McKee (SNP) [S6M-12177] **Immediate Ceasefire in Palestine and Israel** – That the Parliament notes with concern reports of the recent upsurge in violence in Palestine and Israel, which, it understands, has seen more than 28,000 people, including mostly women and children, killed by Israeli forces in Gaza, 1,400 people killed by Hamas and other terrorist organisations in Israel, and more than 300 Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli armed settlers in the West Bank; believes strongly that there is no justification for inflicting terror or killing innocent civilians, or for the taking of civilian hostages, and condemns violence in all its forms; notes with concern what it considers to be the risk of disease and malnutrition in Gaza as a consequence of the Israeli blockade of the strip, which, it believes, may itself constitute a breach of international law; recognises what it sees as the critically important relief work of organisations such as the United Nations

Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and Medical Aid for Palestinians, and notes that the UK Government and others are being urged to continue to financially support this work; considers that this conflict did not begin on 7 October 2023, and notes the belief that a lasting peace with justice will only come through a negotiated settlement; notes the calls for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine and Israel to allow diplomatic discussions to take place that will safeguard innocent civilians; further notes the reported ruling by the International Court of Justice and the view that there may be a case to answer that the actions of Israel in Gaza constitute genocide against the Palestinian people; commends the work of Israeli human rights organisations, including B'Tselem and Breaking the Silence, which, it considers, continue to make the case for a lasting and just peace in what it sees as these horrific times; notes the calls on the UK Government, including from communities in the Glasgow Provan constituency, to do its part in working with other UN nations to demand an end to deadly military action in Gaza and settler violence in the West Bank, and to bring to justice those responsible for terror attacks and any who may be guilty of war crimes or incitement to genocide, and further notes the calls on the UK Government to recognise the State of Palestine.

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-12177>

The International Court of Justice ruling (Order) referred to above can be read at
<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Turkey: Religious Freedom

Lord Patten (Conservative) [HL2041] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the safety of UK citizens seeking to worship in Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in Turkey.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The FCDO routinely updates our travel advice, which provides guidance for British nationals on staying safe abroad, including in Turkey. Our travel advice notes that no travel can be guaranteed safe and in Turkey terrorists may target places visited by foreigners, including places of worship. The UK stands with Turkey against terrorism, and we welcome the Turkish authorities' swift response to security threats, such as the fatal shooting which took place at Santa Maria Church in Istanbul on 28 January. We support the rights of all minority groups in Turkey, including Christians and Jews.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-30/hl2041>

The travel advice referred to above can be read at
<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/turkey>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arms Trade (Inquiry and Suspension) Bill

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

Criminal Justice Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3511>

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

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>

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill - Standard Tier (closing date 18 March 2024)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/martyns-law-standard-tier-consultation>

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