



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

SCoJeC is incurring significant extra costs as a result of the war in Israel and Gaza, including producing expanded issues of this digest. Please help us maintain these resources by donating at

www.scojec.org/donate.html

Thank you very much for your support.



Home Affairs

House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Higher Education: Investment and Procurement

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative) [HL3680] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they are aware of any examples in the past five years of higher education institutions succumbing to pressure from student unions to undertake boycott divestment and sanction actions in relation to their investment and procurement decisions.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone (Conservative) [HL3681] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the risk that higher education institutions succumb to pressure from student unions to undertake boycott divestment and sanction actions in relation to their investment and procurement decisions.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: The Government is aware that the BDS Movement has taken credit for divestments from Israeli companies carried out by universities following pressure from student campaigns. For example, the BDS Movement took credit for divestments from Israeli military suppliers by the University of Manchester in 2020 and procurement decisions by King's College London and Southampton University. The Government is also aware of recent examples of student unions passing motions to lobby their universities to boycott and divest from Israeli companies, including for example Manchester University Student Union in 2022 and Warwick University Student Union in 2023. There are concerns that these campaigns can damage community cohesion and legitimise antisemitism. There

are also examples overseas of the BDS Movement pressing universities to boycott or divest from Israeli companies for example in Norway or the United States of America. The Bill rightly applies to universities and higher education providers to prevent them succumbing to student union pressure in the future and to tackle this type of divisive activity on campuses.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3680>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3681>

Information about the Bill referred to above can be read at

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

Sanctions: Local Government and Public Bodies

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Labour) [HL3661] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have received any representations from allies at ministerial or ambassadorial level about specific boycotts undertaken by UK local authorities or other public bodies.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe: The Government is concerned by instances of local authorities and other public bodies pursuing boycotts and divestment activity. These campaigns can undermine community cohesion and are often inconsistent with UK Government foreign policy. Complete details of representations are not held centrally, but we are not aware of representations about specific boycotts from such sources.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3661>

Religious Freedom

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour) [HL3631] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that regular meetings take place between Ministers from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and UK faith communities on the impact of conflict on people of faith.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We recognise that conflicts, including the current conflict in the Middle East, can impact on British faith communities and lead to a rise in community tensions. Baroness Scott, DLUHC Minister for Faith, maintains an active programme of engagement with faith community representatives to discuss a range of issues, including the impact of the current conflict in the Middle East on British faith communities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/hl3631>

Police Scotland

Weekly Hate Crime and Incident Report: Week 1: 1st April – 7th April

<https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/125iuopa/hate-crime-and-incidents-report-week-1-002.pdf>

TOP

Israel

See also Lords written answers HL3680 and HL3681 “Higher Education: Investment and Procurement”, and HL3631 “Religious Freedom” that are included in the Home Affairs section above.

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel Defense Forces: British Nationals Abroad

Baroness Warsi (Conservative) [HL3704] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of British nationals travelling to Israel to fight in the Israel Defence Forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK recognises the right of British nationals with more than one nationality to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of their additional nationalities. This includes the Israel Defence Force.

With respect to the current conflict in Gaza, Section 4 of the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870 makes it an offence for a British subject to enlist in the military of a foreign state at war with another foreign state with which the UK is at peace. That prohibition does not extend, however, to enlistment in a foreign government's forces which are engaged in a civil war or combating terrorism or internal uprisings. The Occupied Palestinian Territories are not currently recognised as a state by the UK. The 1870 Act therefore does not apply in this instance.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3704>

The Foreign Enlistment Act 1870, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/33-34/90>

Israel Defense Forces: British Nationals Abroad

Baroness Warsi (Conservative) [HL3705] To ask His Majesty's Government how many British or dual British nationals are currently serving in the Israel Defence Forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of reports of UK citizens travelling to fight for the Israel Defence Force (IDF), but the Government does not estimate the numbers of those who have done so.

The UK recognises the right of British nationals with more than one nationality to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of their additional nationalities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3705>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Israel Defense Forces: British Nationals Abroad

Baroness Warsi (Conservative) [HL3706] To ask His Majesty's Government what arrangements are in place to engage with British nationals returning to the UK after serving in the Israel Defence Forces to ascertain whether they have been involved in any breaches to the Geneva Convention.

Baroness Warsi (Conservative) [HL3707] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of any risk posed to national security and national cohesion of returning British nationals who have served in the Israel Defence Forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK recognises the right of British nationals with more than one nationality to serve in the legitimately recognised armed forces of their additional nationalities. This includes the Israel Defence Force.

Anyone who travels to conflict zones to engage in unlawful activity should expect to be investigated upon their return to the UK. Decisions on prosecutions are taken independently by the police and Crown Prosecution Service on a case-by-case basis.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3706>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3707>

Proscribed Organisations: Arms Trade

Lord Pickles (Conservative) [HL3595] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to build consensus among international partners on halting the supply of arms

to all parties funding, sheltering or supporting proscribed terrorist groups, including Hamas.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is a signatory to the Arms Trade Treaty and fully implements its provisions. While the Treaty does not explicitly prohibit transfers to non-state actors, the UK considers that the requirements in Article 7 (Export and Export Assessment) and Article 11 (Diversion) require States Parties to take all appropriate steps to prevent the sale or diversion of arms to undesirable end uses or end users, including terrorist groups. Specifically, Article 7 deals with exports which would 'undermine peace and security' or could be used to breach international conventions or protocols relating to terrorism to which the exporting state is a party.

The Government will also not grant an export licence if to do so would be inconsistent with the Strategic Export Licensing Criteria, which includes Criterion 1: respect for the UK's international obligations and commitments. An export licence will also be refused if there is a risk that the items will be diverted to an undesirable end-user or for an undesirable end-use, including to terrorist organisations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3595>

The Arms Trade Treaty, referred to above, can be read at

<https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/English7.pdf>

The Criteria referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-12-08/hcws449>

UNRWA: Finance

Lord Weir of Ballyholme (DUP) [HL3611] To ask His Majesty's Government how much funding they provided to UNRWA in each of the past five years.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK provided the following funding to UNRWA in each of the last five financial years:

FY 2019 - 20: £65.5 million

FY 2020 - 21: £65 million

FY 2021 - 22: £11 million

FY 2022 - 23: £18.7 million

FY 2023 - 24: £35 million

The UK provided £35 million to UNRWA this financial year, including an uplift of £16 million for the Gaza humanitarian response, all of which was disbursed before the recent allegations came to light. No more British funding is due this financial year and we have paused any future funding of UNRWA.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3611>

The following three questions both received the same answer

Hamas: UNRWA

Lord Mott (Conservative) [HL3590] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports (1) that the car park of UNRWA's headquarters in Gaza sank in 2014 as a result of subterranean terror infrastructure, and (2) that UNRWA did not investigate this sinking.

Lord Mott (Conservative) [HL3591] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that UNRWA did not remove the terror infrastructure beneath Zaitun Preparatory A Boys School in Gaza it discovered in 2021.

Lord Pickles (Conservative) [HL3596] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the implications for the UK's foreign policy of Israel's claims to have discovered a Hamas intelligence command centre and terror tunnels beneath UNWRA's Gaza headquarters.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK takes allegations of neutrality violations seriously including any incidents related to UN installations. This is something we

monitor closely in our annual assessment of UNRWA. When violations have been identified in the past, UNRWA has taken action including raising the issue with relevant parties.

We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General. Their independent investigations include assessment of the policies and systems UNRWA has in place to ensure neutrality.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3590>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3591>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3596>

Ismail Haniyeh

Lord Shinkwin (Conservative) [HL3601] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of recent reports that Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was an UNRWA teacher.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK takes allegations of neutrality violations seriously including any allegations related to Hamas' involvement in UNRWA's education provision. This is something we monitor closely in our annual assessment of UNRWA. When violations have been identified in the past, UNRWA has taken action including raising the issue with relevant parties.

We are aware that the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and Catherine Colonna have now provided their interim reports to the UN Secretary-General. Their independent investigations include assessment of the policies and systems UNRWA has in place to ensure neutrality.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-25/hl3601>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Lord Turnberg (Labour) [HL3702] To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that Hamas is seeking to prevent airdrops of aid provided by the UK and others.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We continue to carry out air drops, including most recently on 9 April. We are using the A400M, a highly capable tactical and strategic airlift platform, with drop zones surveyed before and during the airdrop to ensure aid is delivered safely to civilians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3702>

Gaza: Humanitarian Aid

Lord Turnberg (Labour) [HL3703] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they have any evidence that Hamas is diverting aid meant for Gazan civilians for its own use.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: All UK aid undergoes rigorous oversight. Our programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories operate with enhanced sensitivity with additional safeguards to protect against any possibility of aid diversion. They include measures to verify and map downstream partners, non-payment of local taxes and enhanced due-diligence processes. We constantly review the due-diligence assessments in place with all partners involved in delivering aid in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. No funding goes to Hamas and we have no information to indicate that UK aid sent to Gaza over the last five years has been used for unintended purposes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-27/hl3703>

Downing Street

PM statement on Iranian regime's reckless attack against Israel

I condemn in the strongest terms the Iranian regime's reckless attack against Israel. These strikes risk inflaming tensions and destabilising the region. Iran has once again demonstrated that it is intent on sowing chaos in its own backyard.

The UK will continue to stand up for Israel's security and that of all our regional partners, including Jordan and Iraq. Alongside our allies, we are urgently working to stabilise the situation and prevent further escalation. No one wants to see more bloodshed.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-statement-on-iranian-regimes-reckless-attack-against-israel>

Rishi Sunak Iran's attack last night was a dangerous and unnecessary escalation. I want to pay tribute to the professionalism and bravery of the @RoyalAirForce and our allies in protecting civilians. [plus video]

<https://twitter.com/RishiSunak/status/1779467741956551010>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

David Cameron Iran's reckless attacks on Israel will only further inflame tensions in the Middle East. The UK calls on the Iranian regime to stop this serious escalation, which is in no one's interest.

https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1779266507404399014

David Cameron Today I spoke with @gantzbe to discuss our shared concerns about Iranian threats to attack Israel. Further escalation in the region is in no-one's interest and risks further loss of civilian life. The UK will continue to work with our partners in support of regional security.

https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1779102913060577545

David Cameron More than 8,000 patients have been treated at @UKMed's field hospital in Gaza, funded by UK Aid, since March. This includes a high proportion of children, as well as evacuees from the north. I pay tribute to the brave British workers in ITV's report. [plus link to the ITV report]

https://twitter.com/David_Cameron/status/1778835302217339255

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Ministry of Defence

UK Military Activity in the Middle East

In response to increased Iranian threats and the growing risk of escalation in the Middle East, the UK Government has been working with partners across the region to encourage de-escalation and prevent further attacks.

We have moved several additional Royal Air Force jets and air refuelling tankers to the

region. These will bolster Operation Shader, which is the UK's existing counter-Daesh operation in Iraq and Syria. In addition, these UK jets will intercept any airborne attacks within range of our existing missions, as required.

We will continue to cooperate closely with our regional partners in the interest of de-escalation.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-military-activity-in-the-middle-east>

Scottish Government

UK arms sales to Israel: letter to Lord Ahmad: First Minister Humza Yousaf has responded to the UK Government's decision not to end the sale of arms exports to Israel.

Thank you for your letter of 8 April replying to mine to the Prime Minister of 23 February and 3 April.

I welcome the UK Government's stated commitment to International Humanitarian Law, our diplomats' contribution to finally achieving a UN Security Council Resolution, and the UK's wider efforts to bring an end to the tragedy befalling the people of the Middle East.

I share with you the grief at the killing of three British aid workers, along with every other innocent man, woman and child killed in Gaza and Israel since Hamas's terrorist attacks of 7 October and Israel's response, which has gone far beyond any legitimate response. In spite of everything contained in your comprehensive reply, I note that you have not agreed to my call to end the license of arms exports to Israel, which means that the UK will continue to arm Israel's war in Gaza. A war that has left tens of thousands dead, the majority reported to be women and children.

As I said in my letter of 3 April, by continuing to arm Israel, the United Kingdom Government is in danger of being complicit in the killing of innocent civilians.

I find it difficult to comprehend that this continues to be the United Kingdom's position against the backdrop of the ICJ ruling; UN Security Council, General Assembly and Human Rights Council Resolutions; countless UN officials' statements about the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza; and the recent open letter signed by over 600 legal professionals warning of potential UK complicity in grave breaches of international law, including violations of the Genocide Convention.

If this, alongside the killing of British nationals among at least 35,000 dead – the majority of whom are innocent women and children – is insufficient to change your policy, what more will it take? ...

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/uk-arms-sales-israel-letter-lord-ahmad/>

Lord Ahmad's letter referred to above is not currently available online.

The First Minister's previous letter, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/call-ban-arms-sales-israel-letter-prime-minister/>

The ICJ 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>

The open letter referred to above can be read at

<https://lawyersletter.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Gaza-letter-FIN-3-April.pdf>

and the list of signatories at

<https://lawyersletter.uk/>

Northern Ireland Assembly Written Answer

Engagement: Israeli Government

Gerry Carroll (People Before Profit Alliance) [AQW 6255/22-27] To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any (i) engagement; and (ii) planned engagement they have had with representatives of the Israeli government.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister: We have not had engagement and have no planned engagements with representatives of the Israeli government in our role as FM and dFM

<https://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=388214>

United Nations

Gaza: No improvement in aid access to north, insists senior UN aid official

The situation for Gazans remains dire despite hopes stemming from recent commitments by Israel to boost assistance, the UN's top aid official in the Occupied Palestinian Territory said on Friday.

Jamie McGoldrick, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator overseeing crisis relief in Gaza, pushed back at Israeli claims that more than 1,000 trucks had entered Gaza in the last few days, but only around 800 had been collected on the Palestinian side.

The veteran aid official also maintained that the deconfliction system in which humanitarians shared their coordinates with the warring sides was "consistently inaccurate", but that he had raised these and other operational concerns with the Israeli military at their first meeting earlier this week.

"It's very easy for Israel to say we've sent you 1,000 trucks so please deliver them inside Gaza," he said, in a renewed appeal to the Israeli authorities to recognise that their responsibility as the occupying Power "only ends when...aid reaches the civilians in Gaza". Describing long delays at checkpoints and a "security vacuum" inside the enclave that continues to hamper the delivery of aid where it is most needed, the UN official noted that the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) team, whose vehicle was hit by live ammunition on Thursday, had been held "for hours" at a checkpoint on Salah Al Deen Road.

So far this month, some 60 hours have been wasted in this way, Mr. McGoldrick insisted. "And then what happens sometimes, it's too late in the day – because you can only travel in daylight hours – to go north and therefore sometimes the mission is cancelled. And then we get blamed by Israel for cancelling the convoy, cancelling the mission to the north."

Only three roads are open to humanitarian relief in Gaza today: the middle route via Salah Al Deen Road, the coastal Al Rashid Road and the military road on the east side of Gaza.

"At no point in time in the last month and more have we had three or even two of those roads working at the same time simultaneously," the UN aid coordinator maintained, adding that all of the highways were in "very poor condition". ...

Insisting on the need for a direct telephone line to the Israeli military "and the ability to speak to them", Mr. McGoldrick noted that the targeting of the non-governmental organisation World Central Kitchen convoy two weeks ago was only recent evidence of the frequent dangers faced by aid teams operating in Gaza.

"We have to have handheld radios, VHF radios, all the things you have in any normal issue, in a normal crisis. We don't have them," he said, maintaining that the Israeli authorities had not allowed them for fear that they might be used by Hamas fighters. ...

Damage to Al Shifa Hospital – Gaza's biggest – during a two-week Israeli military raid had left a "huge crater" in the specialised surgery block, said Thanos Gargavanis, WHO trauma surgeon and emergency officer.

Speaking from Gaza, Dr Gargavanis said that the hospital had been completely destroyed, including the oxygen plant, laboratory equipment and other critical equipment including a

CT scanner and other machines required to provide lifesaving care. ...

The WHO and other UN agencies have ensured that the deceased found at Al Shifa can receive a dignified burial, after naming the bodies or making it possible for them to be identified by DNA testing in future.

“After this destruction, we feel that we are returning 60 years before when medical imaging was not available, where laboratory tests were not available,” Dr Gargavanis said. “We want to stress again that hospitals should never be militarized.”

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1148481>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Türk condemns Iran's attacks on Israel, calls for de-escalation

I strongly condemn the wide-scale attacks launched last night by Iran against Israel. Such missile and drone attacks had the potential to cause significant harm beyond military targets and put civilians at risk. This only adds fuel to the fire in the whole region. I remind all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

I am deeply worried about the potential humanitarian and human rights cost if this escalation leads to wider conflict in the Middle East. I urge all parties to take steps to de-escalate the situation, and call on third States, in particular those with influence, to do all in their power to ensure there is no further deterioration in an already extremely precarious situation.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/04/turk-condemns-irans-attacks-israel-calls-de-escalation>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Religious Freedom

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Labour) [HL3630] To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to facilitate engagement and meetings between faith communities and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is one of the UK's longstanding human rights priorities. I and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, regularly meets with members of different faith communities to discuss freedom of religion or belief around the world. She also attends each meeting of the UK FoRB Forum, which brings together around 80 civil society groups working on the issue. Over the last year, she has hosted a series of round table meetings focussing on different countries of concern, at which various faith groups have been well represented.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-03-26/hl3630>

TOP

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>

Amendment Paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0415.pdf

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

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-bill>

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

TOP

Consultations

** new or updated today

**** closes in 5 days**

European Commission: 1st progress report of the EU antisemitism strategy
(closing date 19 April 2024)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14204-1st-progress-report-of-the-EU-antisemitism-strategy_en

**** Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator: Charity banking challenges survey 2024**
(closing date 15 May 2024)

<https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/have-your-say-charity-banking-challenges-survey-2024/>

[TOP](#)

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