



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

col 432 Lucy Powell (Labour): ... Last week, the Leader of the House and I launched a guide for MPs and candidates on tackling conspiracy theories. We agreed that conspiracy theories are a form of radicalisation, and we must all do everything we can to combat them. Is she therefore as disappointed as I am to see the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) sharing in campaign literature a conspiracy theory featured in that guide relating to 15-minute cities, which is closely linked to antisemitism and far-right movements? Just last week, the hon. Lady gave a staunch defence of her actions, showing no contrition for the damage she has caused. Will the Leader of the House send her a copy of the guide, and tell her why she has made a big mistake and why she should quickly and strongly renounce it? ...

Penny Mordaunt: ...The hon. Lady mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), and I am sorry that she made those comments and implied that my hon. Friend has antisemitic views. That is quite wrong, and I am afraid it is a pattern of behaviour of inciting unpleasant things. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-16/debates/F5AB3BBF-E6A5-4347-99D4-9E8DA304AFB5/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-B0E5F5AB-47CA-4B6D-B9AB-2A8C56A181A1>

Business of the House

Michael Ellis (Conservative): The Seret International Israeli Film Festival runs for a couple of weeks from today. Wonderful independent films will be shown in arthouse cinemas across the world. But of course antisemites are trying to bully and intimidate cinema chains into not showing the films and, in some cases, are sadly succeeding. Would the Curzon or Picturehouse cinema chains decline to show films made by the black community because of a war in Africa? Obviously, the answer is no, and the reason is because that would be racist. So it is with those sick antisemites whose loathing for Jewish people is so extreme that they are now trying to boycott Jewish culture in the UK. Will my right hon. Friend agree to organise a debate in this place to support Jewish art and culture? Perhaps Parliament could even show one of the independent films, which have nothing to do with the conflict in the middle east, here in one of the Committee rooms, for example.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for giving us a very good example of how antisemitism gets a hold. It starts with things like this, which might seem a reasonable thing for a venue to do but clearly is not. The way he sets it out illustrates why it is not. It is really disturbing and I hope that all Members recognise that this community is really under attack. We need to be absolutely unequivocal and say that we stand with them, and that we will do everything we can to protect them and call out antisemitism wherever it is.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-16/debates/F5AB3BBF-E6A5-4347-99D4-9E8DA304AFB5/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-2977BEB9-094C-46BB-B918-258D366EBF0F>

House of Commons Point of Order

Point of Order

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very grateful to you for allowing me to raise a point of order from the Front Bench. It relates to comments that the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), made at the start of business questions. She did notify me that she was going to make those comments, but after business questions had started. However, this point of order is more about the content of the comments, which I personally found very difficult.

I did write to my constituents over a year ago about a consultation that is being run by my local council on 15 to 20-minute communities. In that letter, I pointed to some of the rumours about 15-minute cities, because that is something that constituents have raised with me. That consultation is still live on the council's website—it is on page 45 of its planning and appraisals document—so this is very much a constituency-based issue.

However, I find it very difficult to be accused of being a conspiracy theorist on the back of that, especially as the vaccines Minister. Whenever there is a debate in this place on that subject, the number of death threats and the amount of abuse that I get is overwhelming at times. I realise that colleagues sometimes have valid points to raise, but there is a backlash whenever those debates are held.

More importantly, being linked to antisemitism when my family in London are actually Jewish, and have had a very difficult time over the past few months, was devastating. I kindly ask the shadow Leader of the House to either withdraw those statements, or just to reflect that while we all play politics in this space, sometimes things are very personal. ...

Lucy Powell (Labour): ... Can I put on the record that I did not say or imply that she was either a conspiracy theorist or antisemitic? I do not believe that she is either of those things. I was highlighting the dangers of sharing, however inadvertently, campaigns that featured in a guide to conspiracy theories that the Leader of the House and I published last week for MPs. That guide is in the Library, and I would urge the hon. Member for Lewes to read

its section on 15-minute cities and the link to organisations.

Madam Deputy Speaker: ... There are two important points. The first is on giving advance notice; I did check with the shadow Leader of the House that she had given advance notice. Secondly, I hope that this has led to some clarification of what was said and what was meant. I am not responsible for what Members say in the Chamber, but I remind everybody that good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-05-16/debates/F5AB3BBF-E6A5-4347-99D4-9E8DA304AFB5/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-BD494488-8DE5-441E-8CAF-4C592E9333CD>

The Guide referred to above can be read at

<https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Conspiracy-Theory-Guide.pdf>

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Israel

See also Commons oral answer “Business of the House” responding to a question from Michael Ellis that is included in the Home Affairs section above, and Commons written answer 24947 “Ghassan Abu-Sittah” that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Written Answers

War Crimes: Gaza

Caroline Lucas (Green) [25822] To ask the Attorney General, whether she has written to the Prime Minister on Gaza and war crimes since 1 April 2024.

Victoria Prentis: I cannot answer your question as to do so would be in breach of the Law Officers’ Convention.

Paragraph 2.13 of the Ministerial Code clearly states that the fact that the Law Officers have advised or have not advised and the content of their advice must not be disclosed outside Government without their authority.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-13/25822>

The Ministerial Code, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63a4628bd3bf7f37654767f2/Ministerial_Code.pdf

Gaza: Reconstruction

Lisa Nandy (Labour) [24902] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has had preliminary discussions with (a) NGOs, (b) partner nations and (iii) the UN on future reconstruction of Gaza's education system.

Andrew Mitchell: Post-conflict recovery and reconstruction must be led by Palestinians, but the international community will also need to play a major collective role in this effort. We are progressing our thinking on all aspects of recovery and reconstruction. We have begun discussions with multilateral and bilateral partners on the financing and coordination of reconstruction.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/24902>

The following three questions all received the same answer

UNRWA: Finance

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [25895] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether

the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs has had recent discussions with (a) Ministers and (b) Officials in (i) 10 Downing Street and (ii) the Cabinet Office on the decision to suspend funding to UNRWA.

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [25896] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether his Department has made any submissions to (a) 10 Downing Street and (b) the Cabinet Office on the potential merits of re-instating funding to UNRWA.

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [25897] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of re-instating funding to UNRWA, in the context of the recent report from Catherine Colonna.

Andrew Mitchell: Allegations that UNRWA staff were involved in the events that took place on 7 October in Israel are appalling, which is why we took decisive action to pause future funding to the organisation.

The Prime Minister has been clear that the UK will set out its position on future funding to UNRWA following careful consideration of Catherine Colonna's final report, UNRWA's response and the ongoing UN Office for Internal Oversight Services investigation into these allegations.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-13/25895>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-13/25896>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-13/25897>

Catherine Colonna's report, referred to above, can be read at

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2024/04/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf

UNRWA's response referred to above can be read at

<https://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/unrwa-preliminary-response-final-report-independent-review-mechanisms-and>

House of Lords Written Answer

Gaza: Israel

Lord Wigley (Plaid Cymru) [HL4314] To ask His Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel regarding bringing their military operations in Gaza to a conclusion as soon as possible.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The fastest way to end the conflict is to secure a deal which gets the hostages out and allows for a stop in the fighting in Gaza. The Prime Minister discussed the current hostage negotiations with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 30 April and expressed his hope that negotiations are concluded to allow hostages to return home as soon as possible.

We are clear that the vital elements for a lasting peace include the release of all 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 and ensures Israelis and Palestinians can live in security and dignity.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-01/hl4314>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

A successful negotiation is the best route to get all hostages returned to their families: UK statement at the UN Security Council

... After 222 days in captivity, 134 hostages remain in Gaza, including British nationals and others with strong UK links. We are extremely concerned about the reports that many of them are believed to be very ill or deceased. The UK is clear: we call for the immediate, unconditional release of all hostages in Gaza held by Hamas and other groups.

Hostage-taking is unlawful and poses a clear threat to international peace and security. We unequivocally condemn the taking of hostages by Hamas. And as we have heard today, the implications on the health and psychological well-being of hostages can be catastrophic, as is the impact and lasting trauma on their families and on their communities. We reiterate the need for the ICRC to be granted urgent access to all hostages held by Hamas. And we are also working urgently to advocate against a ground offensive in Rafah which would have devastating consequences for the civilians sheltering there.

Since the beginning of this crisis, the UK has worked with partners seeking to secure a deal which gets the hostages out and allows for a pause in the fighting to ensure the delivery of vital humanitarian, life-saving aid which is urgently needed. We must then work with our international partners to turn that pause into a sustainable, permanent ceasefire. We continue to support the ongoing efforts of Egypt, Qatar, and the US in this regard.

My Prime Minister spoke to the Emir of Qatar on 13 May. They acknowledged the importance of a resumption of negotiations, which followed the Foreign Secretary's conversation with Foreign Minister Shoukry earlier that week. The United Kingdom has always been clear: a successful negotiation is the best route to get all hostages returned to their families.

The hostage families, including those we've heard from today, are being forced to live through unimaginable pain. Both my Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have met on numerous occasions with family members, in both Israel and in the UK, to hear about their ordeal. The UK government is providing ongoing support to those affected and remains committed to doing as much as we can for their loved ones to be returned.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-successful-negotiation-is-the-best-route-to-get-all-hostages-returned-to-their-families-uk-statement-at-the-un>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Ministry of Defence

UK aid delivered to Gaza shore

... UK aid has been successfully delivered to the Gaza shore today, in the first delivery across the US-built temporary pier.

The first of 8,400 shelter coverage kits – temporary shelters made up of plastic sheeting – have arrived in Gaza, alongside aid from the US and UAE.

This is the first consignment of UK aid to be delivered through the Cyprus maritime corridor, following screening in Larnaca port. ...

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said: UK aid is now being delivered to people through the temporary pier off Gaza. This is the culmination of a herculean joint international effort, and I pay tribute to our Armed Forces who alongside our partners have played a central role delivering this much needed support.

More aid will follow in the coming weeks, but we know the maritime route is not the only answer. We need to see more land routes open, including via the Rafah crossing, to

ensure much more aid gets safely to civilians in desperate need of help.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron said: This first delivery of UK aid through the Cyprus Maritime Corridor is a major milestone in the international community's efforts to maximise aid going into Gaza. The UK has played a central role in this and we're already working on getting our next shipment into Gaza soon as possible.

But maritime is just one part of the bigger picture. Land routes remain the most effective means of getting aid into Gaza at the scale needed. Gazans are at risk of famine and in desperate need of supplies - Israel must ensure land routes are open and that aid gets safely to where it is needed.

Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said: The newly operational pier off the coast of Gaza will enable truckloads of humanitarian aid to reach Palestinians in dire need.

The UK continues to play a key role in this herculean international effort ...

We expect the first shipment to provide enough provisions to feed 11,000 people for a month. ...

The UK is clear that the corridor is not a replacement for land routes, which remain the most effective way of getting aid into Gaza. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary continue to call on Israel to meet its commitment to allow at least 500 aid trucks into Gaza through land crossings and open as many routes as possible.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-delivered-to-gaza-shore>

Department for Business and Trade

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Israel

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66322ad52ea7c8bba6ebe128/israel-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-05-03.pdf>

Updated Trade and Investment Factsheet: Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66321d5fc475cab8c9ebe10c/occupied-palestinian-territories-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2024-05-03.pdf>

International Court of Justice

Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)

Presentation of the case by South Africa, 16 May 2024

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240516-ora-01-00-bi.pdf>

Argument by Israel, 17 May 2024

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240517-ora-01-00-bi.pdf>

United Nations

Overcoming Obstacles Requires Breaking Circle of Division, Working Together towards More Peaceful Future, Secretary-General Tells Arab States Summit

... We gather as hearts are breaking for Palestinians in Gaza. The war in Gaza is an open wound that threatens to infect the entire region. In its speed and scale, it is the deadliest conflict in my time as Secretary-General — for civilians, aid workers, journalists and our own UN colleagues.

Of course, nothing can justify the abhorrent 7 October terror attacks by Hamas. I reiterate my call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. And nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. Yet the toll on civilians continues to escalate.

Entire families wiped out. Children traumatized and injured for life. People denied access to the very basics for human survival. A looming famine.

Any assault on Rafah is unacceptable. It would inflict another surge of pain and misery when we need a surge in life-saving aid. It is time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains the backbone of our operations in Gaza and a lifeline for Palestine refugees across the region. It needs full support and funding.

I am also deeply troubled by tensions in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, with a spike in illegal Israeli settlements, settler violence, excessive use of force by Israeli Defense Forces, demolitions and evictions.

The only permanent way to end the cycle of violence and instability is through a two-State solution, Israel and Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. The demographic and historical character of Jerusalem must be preserved, and the status quo at the holy sites must be upheld, in line with the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sqsm22230.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN expert horrified by death of Gazan orthopedic surgeon in Israeli detention

... "I am horrified at the news about the death of Dr. Adnan Al Bursh while being detained by Israel," said Tlaleng Mofokeng, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.

Dr. Al Bursh, 50, was the head of the orthopedic department at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. He reportedly died on 19 April 2024 in Ofer prison, an Israeli detention facility in the West Bank, and his body has not yet been released by Israeli authorities.

Mofokeng said he had been detained with other doctors and medical personnel by Israeli forces on 18 December 2023, at Al Awda Hospital in North Gaza. At that time, he was generally in good health and was performing his duties normally.

"He was detained while undertaking his duty to patients and caring for them according to the oath he took as a medical practitioner," the expert said. "He died for trying to protect the rights to life and health of his patients."

Before his death, Dr. Al Bursh had reportedly been beaten in prison, with his body showing signs of torture.

"Dr. Adnan's case raises serious concerns that he died following torture at the hands of Israeli authorities. His death demands an independent international investigation," the Special Rapporteur said.

"I am deeply saddened that I continue to receive reports of doctors being killed in this conflict," Mofokeng said. The Ministry of Health in Gaza has reported that at least 493 healthcare workers from Gaza have been killed since 7 October 2023. This includes nurses, paramedics, doctors, and other medical personnel. Many more have been injured. The World Health Organization has reported that at least 214 healthcare workers have been detained by Israeli forces while on duty. ...

"Healthcare workers should not be killed practicing their profession," she said.

The Special Rapporteur called for Israel to immediately release all healthcare workers arbitrarily detained in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, and urgent, independent

and impartial investigations, and accountability for those who have unlawfully detained and killed them. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/un-expert-horrified-death-gazan-orthopedic-surgeon-israeli-detention>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Ghassan Abu-Sittah

Philippa Whitford (SNP) [24947] To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary, pursuant to the Answer of 23 April 2024 to Question 22020 on Ghassan Abu Sittah, whether he has (a) received information on the reasons that Germany issued a Schengen Area wide travel ban on British-Palestinian national Dr. Abu Sittah and (b) held discussions with his (i) German and (ii) French counterpart on that matter.

Andrew Mitchell: We have not sought or received information from the French or German Authorities on this matter, nor held discussions with them about it.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-05-07/24947>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-04-16/22020>

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Other Relevant Information

European Court of Human Rights

Ban on visible symbols of belief in the official education system of the Flemish Community not incompatible with Article 9 of the Convention

... The case concerned three young women who identify as Muslims. They complained that they were unable to wear the Islamic headscarf in their secondary schools (except during religious education classes), following the prohibition on wearing any visible symbols of one's beliefs in the official education system of the Flemish Community. ...

With regard to Article 9 of the Convention, the Court noted that the present case concerned a type of public education, namely the official education system in the Flemish Community. In accordance with Article 24 § 1 (3) of the Constitution, this education had to be neutral. Under this constitutional provision, neutrality implied, in particular, respect for the philosophical, ideological or religious convictions of parents and pupils.

In order to comply with this constitutional requirement, the GO! Council had decided to introduce a general prohibition on wearing visible symbols of belief within its establishments, and the Constitutional Court had held that this concept of neutrality was compatible with Article 24 § 1 (e) of the Constitution. ...

... the Court considered that the concept of neutrality in the Community's education system, understood as prohibiting, in general, the wearing by pupils of visible symbols of belief, did not in itself run counter to Article 9 of the Convention and its underlying values. In this connection, it noted that the contested ban was not confined to the Islamic veil but applied without distinction to any visible symbols of one's beliefs.

Moreover, the applicants had freely chosen to attend schools within the Community education system, and could not have been unaware that the relevant governing bodies were required by the Constitution to ensure compliance with the principle of neutrality in such schools. ...

In the present case, the national authorities had been entitled, having regard to the discretion available to them, to envisage that the Flemish Community's education system would provide a school environment in which pupils did not wear religious symbols. The Court had emphasised on several occasions that pluralism and democracy were to be based on dialogue and a spirit of compromise, necessarily entailing various concessions on the part of individuals that were justified in order to maintain and promote the ideals and values of a democratic society. The contested restriction could therefore be regarded as proportionate to the aims pursued, namely the protection of the rights and freedoms of others and of public order, and thus "necessary" "in a democratic society". It followed that the complaints under Article 9 of the Convention were manifestly ill-founded. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-7946741-11074580>

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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>

Amendment Paper

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0155/amend/criminal_rm_rep_0517.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>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

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

Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill

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

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>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Faith school designation reforms (closing date 20 June 2024)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/faith-schools-policy-team/faith-school-designation-reforms/>

Review of the RSHE statutory guidance (closing date 11 July 2024)

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/rshe-team/review-of-the-rshe-statutory-guidance/>

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