



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Scottish Parliament Written Answer

Religious Observance in Schools

Elena Whitham (SNP) [S6W-27831] To ask the Scottish Government, in light of recently published data by the National Records of Scotland regarding Scotland's Census 2022, which show that over 60% of the school-age population had no religion, whether it will follow the advice of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and allow young people the right to opt out of religious observance in schools.

Jenny Gilruth: As stated in the Scottish Government's Initial Response to the Concluding Observations issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, published on 25 March this year, the Scottish Government is considering its next steps on religious observance in schools to ensure compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under current legislation in Scotland, religious observance is not compulsory, and parents are legally entitled to withdraw their children from religious observance in local authority and grant-aided schools. This is supported by detailed guidance which states that 'schools should include children and young people in any discussions about aspects of their school experience, ensuring their views are taken into account.'

This guidance is available at: [Curriculum for Excellence: religious observance](https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-27831)
<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-27831>

The census data referred to above can be read at

<https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/scotland-s-census-2022-ethnic-group-national-identity-language-and-religion/>

The UN Committee advice referred to above can be read at

<https://undocs.org/en/CRC/C/GBR/CO/6-7>

The Scottish Government Initial Response referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/united-nations-convention-rights-child-scottish-government-initial-response-concluding-observations-issued-un-committee-rights-child/>

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS)

Hate Crime in Scotland, 2023-24

<https://www.copfs.gov.uk/publications/hate-crime-in-scotland-2023-24/html/>

Hate Crime in Scotland, 2023-24, data tables

<https://www.copfs.gov.uk/media/vktgz1zc/hate-crime-2023-24-tables-final.xlsx>

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Israel

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

UN Security Council adopts resolution on proposed ceasefire and hostage deal between Israel and Hamas: UK statement at the UN Security Council: UK explanation of vote [on] Security Council vote on resolution 2735.

The UK voted for this resolution as an important step in bringing about an end to the conflict that has raged since the horrific attacks on 7th October, and moving towards lasting peace. The situation in Gaza is catastrophic and the suffering has gone on for far too long. The deal on the table is something that the UK has long-called for. It is the best way to get the remaining hostages out, bring about an immediate ceasefire leading to a permanent end to hostilities and enable a significant scaling up of much-needed humanitarian aid.

We call upon the parties to seize this opportunity and move towards lasting peace which guarantees security and stability for both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Far too many lives have been lost already. There is desperate need for humanitarian assistance in Gaza and hostages have now been held for over eight months.

News of the rescue of four hostages will be a huge relief to their families. Our thoughts are also with families of those still captive, and all the innocent lives – both Palestinian and Israeli – already lost and affected by the conflict. We must secure the release of all hostages and end the fighting.

The UK applauds the diplomatic efforts of Qatar, Egypt and the United States in negotiating the deal that is on the table. We note that Israel has accepted the deal, and call upon Hamas to accept the terms and bring an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the hostages that remain in detention.

We must then see a rapid increase in the flows of humanitarian aid throughout the entire Gaza strip, with the opening of all border crossings and facilitation of the minimum operating requirements of the UN and international humanitarian organisations.

The UK remains in steadfast support of a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living side-by-side in peace and delivering security for both nations and the wider region.

As we have made clear, a sustainable peace must also include Hamas no longer being in control of Gaza and international support for the Palestinian Authority so that it can resume governance and security responsibilities across the West Bank and Gaza. The UK stands ready to support this.

President, the UK has long advocated for a deal such as the one on the table.

This conflict has gone on for far too long.

Now more than ever is the time for diplomacy.

Now is the time for peace.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-security-council-adopts-resolution-on-proposed-ceasefire-and-hostage-deal-between-israel-and-hamas-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

UK contributes financial aid to Occupied Palestinian Territories to increase stability

... The UK will provide vital financial support to the Palestinian Authority to support the provision of basic services, providing £10 million in aid this financial year. As the Foreign Secretary has said, a strong and effective Palestinian Authority is vital for lasting peace and progress towards a two-state solution.

This £10 million funding package will provide vital support for key services, for example through the payment of salaries for 8,200 health workers over two months, and will send a clear message to other donors to consider making similar pledges.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa has committed to implementing reforms across the Palestinian economy to fight corruption and tackle inefficiency. ...

The Minister of State for the Middle East Lord (Tariq) Ahmad said: The UK remains committed to providing serious, practical and enduring support to the Palestinian Authority as they take much-needed steps to enact reform.

An effective Palestinian Authority is vital to ensure lasting peace and progress towards a two-state solution but without international support, it is on the brink of collapse. ...

The Palestinian Authority is facing a severe financial crisis – it has only been able to pay its employees half of their salaries, and Israel has withheld tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority, further deepening the crisis.

The financial aid will be delivered through a trusted multilateral mechanism, the World Bank's Palestinian Umbrella for Resilience Support to the Economy (PURSE) Trust Fund's Palestine Emergency Financing Facility (PEFF) project. A further amount of up to £5 million will be available in technical assistance to support the Palestinian Authority's programme of reform, with the objective of increasing transparency, fighting corruption, and improving public sector efficiency.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-contributes-financial-aid-to-occupied-palestinian-territories-to-increase-stability>

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office The UK welcomes the news that the @UN Security Council resolution on a ceasefire and hostage deal has passed. As Foreign Secretary @David_Cameron says, it is an important step in bringing about an end to the conflict and a lasting peace. [plus video of comment by David Cameron]

<https://x.com/FCDOGovUK/status/1800290591731040344>

Adopting Resolution 2735 (2024) with 14 Votes in Favour, Russian Federation Abstaining, Security Council Welcomes New Gaza Ceasefire Proposal, Urges Full Implementation

After 247 days of war in Gaza, the Security Council today adopted by 14 votes in favour - with the Russian Federation abstaining - a resolution proposing a comprehensive three-phase ceasefire deal to end the war in Gaza, urging both Israel and Hamas to implement it fully and without delay and condition.

By resolution 2735 (2024), the 15-member organ noted that the implementation of this proposal would enable the following outcomes to spread over three phases, the first of which would include an immediate, full and complete ceasefire with the release of hostages; the return of the remains of some hostages who have been killed; the exchange of Palestinian prisoners; withdrawal of Israeli forces from the populated areas in Gaza; the return of Palestinian civilians to their homes; and the safe and effective distribution of humanitarian assistance at scale throughout Gaza.

Phase two would see a permanent end to hostilities in exchange for the release of all other hostages still in Gaza and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area. Phase three would mark the start of a major multi-year reconstruction plan for Gaza and the return of the remains of any deceased hostages still in the Strip to their families.

Further by the text, the Council underlined that - if the negotiations take longer than six weeks for phase one - the ceasefire will continue as long as negotiations continue. The Council also rejected any attempt at demographic or territorial change in the Gaza Strip, including any actions that reduce the Strip's territory. ...

The representative of the United States, speaking before the vote, said that “the last eight months had been nothing short but devastating” — for Israelis who lost loved ones on 7 October, when Hamas set this conflict into motion by carrying out acts of unthinkable violence, and for Israelis and people from over 16 other countries whose loved ones are still being held hostage by Hamas. The past eight months have also been devastating for Palestinian civilians in Gaza; nearly 2 million have had to flee from one place to another in search of safety, which has been elusive. Children in Gaza have been traumatized by seeing their family members killed. Calling on Israel “to do everything possible to protect civilians”, she said, however, that “Hamas leaders are those who put civilians at risk”.

Amid the worsening humanitarian situation, “Palestinian civilians are living through sheer hell by no fault of their own”, she said, with “families unsure what the next day holds and millions grappling with the uncertainty of what will be left when they are allowed to return home”. Parents are trying to find food for their families; children are forced to stop their education, and elderly persons no longer have access to medicine.

“The fighting must end in a sustainable way,” she said, calling for an immediate ceasefire with the release of hostages and stressing that a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas is “the only way to bring about a durable end to this war”. She said Hamas has failed to accept any agreement, while Israel has agreed to a comprehensive deal on the table which is “nearly identical to Hamas’ own proposal” — it would bring hostages home, ensure Israel’s security, enable a surge in humanitarian relief, and set the stage for a political settlement that provides a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. “Now we are all waiting for Hamas to agree to the ceasefire deal it claims to want, but we cannot allow to wait and wait,” she stated, noting that “with every passing day, needless suffering continues”. ...

Speaking after the vote, **the representative of the United States** observed: “Today, this Council sent a clear message to Hamas – accept the ceasefire deal on the table.” Israel has already agreed, she added, underscoring that — if Hamas does the same — “the fighting can stop today”. ... “Today, we voted for peace,” she stressed. ...

The representative of the United Kingdom, whose delegation voted in favour, cited the

resolution as “an important step” in bringing about an end to the conflict that has raged since the 7 October attacks. The situation in Gaza is catastrophic, and the suffering has gone on far too long. London has long called for the deal on the table which is “the best way” to get remaining hostages out, bring about an immediate ceasefire leading to a permanent end to hostilities, and enable a significant scaling up of much-needed humanitarian aid. She called on Hamas to accept the deal and end the suffering of the Palestinian people and the hostages who remain in detention. Further, she called for the rapid increase of humanitarian aid, stressing that “now — more than ever — is the time for diplomacy, now is the time for peace”. ... [\[click here to read this speech in full\]](#)

The representative of Switzerland ... said: “This plan currently represents the best chance for a way out of the appalling violence raging in the Middle East.” However, she expressed regret that despite the request of several delegations, the call for respecting international humanitarian law and human rights law — which was included in previous resolutions — “did not find a place” in the text voted in today. “We are relieved that four hostages have — after many months — been reunited with their families,” she continued, while expressing concern over the very high number of Palestinian casualties during the rescue operation in Nuseirat. ...

The representative of Japan ... underscored that “the devastating conflict in Gaza has gone on for far too long,” with too much suffering and loss of innocent life. “The catastrophic humanitarian situation is indescribable,” while many hostages are still being held in appalling conditions. ...

The representative of China, noting that the draft text is still “ambiguous in many aspects”, said that his delegation has “valid concerns” whether the parties concerned will accept the ceasefire proposal and whether the three-phase arrangements can be carried out smoothly. ...

The representative of the Russian Federation said that from the very outset of the military escalation, Moscow has advocated for a permanent ceasefire. ... Noting that “there was no negotiation process”, he also pointed out that — even though Hamas is called upon to accept this so-called deal — there is no clarity regarding official agreement from Israel. In this regard, he recalled numerous statements by Israel that “it will continue in its war until Hamas is defeated”. ...

The representative of Israel said that her country’s goals have been very clear since Hamas’ invasion on 7 October: to bring hostages back home and to dismantle that terrorist group’s capabilities. “Once these goals are met, the war will end,” she stressed, noting that if Hamas released hostages and turned themselves in “not one more shot needs to be fired”. However, 120 hostages are still being held by Hamas, which keeps advancing their goal of “murdering every Israeli”. It is the “genocidal jihadists who started this war” who are preventing the war from ending, she observed, emphasizing that pressure must be applied on Hamas and “blame must be placed where it belongs”. ...

As a result of a heroic operation, the Israel Defense Forces rescued four hostages, who were held in residential buildings by Palestinian families. While the hostages were guarded by terrorists, Gazan civilians were their jailors, she said, adding that those “so-called innocent civilians” were not only cooperating with terrorists, but were complicit with their heinous crimes. “Israel regrets any harm to civilians, but it must be emphasized that Palestinians who cooperate with Hamas and take part in their war crimes are not uninvolved,” she said. While the loss of life is tragic, if States do not put blame on Hamas, they are advancing its strategy. “We will continue until all hostages are returned and until Hamas’ military and governing capabilities are dismantled,” she underscored, adding that Israel will not engage in meaningless negotiations, which Hamas can stall as a way to exploit.

To read the full press release see

<https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15723.doc.htm>

The Resolution referred to above is not yet available online.

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Shock at impact on civilians of Israeli raid in Gaza to free hostages: Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

We are profoundly shocked at the impact on civilians of the Israeli forces' operation in An Nuseirat at the weekend to secure the release of four hostages. Hundreds of Palestinians, many of them civilians, were reportedly killed and injured. The manner in which the raid was conducted in such a densely populated area seriously calls into question whether the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution - as set out under the laws of war - were respected by the Israeli forces.

Our Office is also deeply distressed that Palestinian armed groups continue to hold many hostages, most of them civilians, which is prohibited by international humanitarian law. Furthermore, by holding hostages in such densely populated areas, the armed groups doing so are putting the lives of Palestinian civilians, as well as the hostages themselves, at added risk from the hostilities.

All these actions, by both parties, may amount to war crimes.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, welcomes Security Council [Resolution 2735](#) calling for a "full and complete ceasefire", the release of hostages held by Palestinian armed groups, the return of the remains of dead hostages, and the exchange of Palestinian prisoners. An immediate priority must be to ensure the full and unfettered flow of humanitarian aid to the desperate population of Gaza.

The High Commissioner calls on all parties as well as third States, in particular those with influence over the parties to the conflict, to also maximise efforts to work towards the goal whereby Israelis and Palestinians can fully enjoy all human rights and live side by side, in peace.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2024/06/shock-impact-civilians-israeli-raid-gaza-free-hostages>

UN Women

Gender alert: Voices of strength: Contributions of Palestinian women-led organizations to the humanitarian response in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/gender-alert_palestine-wlos-en.pdf

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Holocaust Memorial Bill

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

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

**** closes in 9 days**

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/>

Petitioning against the Holocaust Memorial Bill (closing date 17 July 2024)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8481/petitioning-against-the-holocaust-memorial-bill/>

House of Lords: Guidance on the right to be heard

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55634/documents/4871>

House of Lords: Guidance on submitting your petition

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/55632/documents/4869>

£20k registration threshold for charities in Northern Ireland (closing date 11 August 2024)

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-ps20k-registration-threshold-charities-northern-ireland>

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill (closing date 16 August 2024)

https://yourviews.parliament.scot/health/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-bill/consult_view/

**** Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill: Financial Memorandum**

(closing date 16 August 2024)

https://yourviews.parliament.scot/finance/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland/consult_view/

**** Gaps in Equality Legislation [Northern Ireland]** (closing date 6 September 2024)

<https://consult.nia-yourassembly.org.uk/committee-for-the-executive-office/gaps-in-equality-legislation-inquiry>

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