

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community
Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
SCoJeC

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House of Lords Debate

Assisted Dying

col 1175 **Baroness Jay of Paddington:** ... While the UK Parliament may have been inactive in the recent past, the international picture has changed significantly. This is particularly true in North America, where Canada and several important jurisdictions in the United States have passed, and indeed implemented, laws to enable assisted dying. Overall, these new laws bear a striking similarity in their provisions and safeguards to those proposed in the Falconer Bill. ...

col 1176 ... what I find surprising is that some of the types of opposition which have so far seemed insurmountable in this country have not prevented change there. Let us take, for instance, the question of religious faith and belief. Americans are known to be more religious and certainly more observant than the British. Surveys suggest that almost three times as many citizens in that country attend a religious service about once a week, and yet religious practice and faith do not seem to have been the intransigent opposition to the concept of assisted dying either by faith leaders or their flocks that we have often heard here. ...

col 1177 While all this has been happening on the other side of the Atlantic, the situation here remains frozen, and today's Parliament really does seem to be out of step with the overwhelming majority of the British public who, when they are surveyed, always support change. ... In 2016, a record number of 47 Britons—those who could afford both financially and physically to do so—travelled to the Swiss organisation Dignitas for assisted deaths. A recent freedom of information request to local authorities revealed that each year more than 300 terminally ill people die by suicide, sadly often taking their lives alone so that they do not involve or incriminate anyone else. ...

col 1178 **Baroness Grey-Thompson:** ... After the last debate in the Chamber I was told by a member of the public, as they looked me up and down, that I must have thought about killing myself many times. The answer is a resounding no, but I was shocked. I am resilient, but imagine if you are constantly told that you have no quality of life or you are persuaded that you are worthless.

The disability rights campaigner Liz Carr has said that, "euthanasia denies the value of people who have illness or disability". The noble and learned Lord, Lord Falconer, stated in his commission report that assisted suicide is not meant for disabled people, "at this

point in time". If legislation in this area is passed, I and others like me are merely in the waiting room. ...

col 1179 Lord Falconer of Thoroton: My Lords, English law shows such an arrogant lack of compassion on this issue. In the Carter case in Canada, the Canadian Supreme Court set aside an identical law on three grounds: it forced people to go to an earlier death when they went to a jurisdiction that allowed assisted suicide; it manifestly infringed individuals' right to dignity and autonomy at the time of their death; and the protection it gave to the vulnerable, which is vital, was overwide because it provided protection to too many when it did not need to be done in that way. ...

col 1183 Lord Rees of Ludlow: ... My Lords, even with the best palliative care, some will survive beyond the stage where they feel life is worth living. That is why 300 people a year with terminal illnesses commit suicide and why the lives of loved ones are sometimes ended in ways that are, strictly, illegal. Those acts may not result in prosecution, but a shadow of criminality hangs over them and adds to the grief of those whose motive is compassion. ...

Support for such a measure is just as strong among the disabled. Among this majority is Stephen Hawking ... He still craves new experiences and does not want to die. He thinks that suicide would be wrong unless one were in great pain, which, thankfully, he is not. None the less—this is the key point—he says that the disabled should have the option, as others do, to end their lives. ...

col 1184 Baroness O'Loan: ... To legislate for assisted dying is to cross a line in the sand, making medical practitioners trained at the most fundamental levels to do no harm into dispensers of medicine which does not cure but kills. ...

col 1186 The Advocate-General for Scotland (Lord Keen of Elie): ... It remains the Government's view that any relaxation of the law in this area is an issue of individual conscience and a matter for Parliament to decide, rather than one for government policy. ... Of course, we are aware that assisted dying legislation has been introduced recently in some states of America and in Canada ... I simply note that while five states in the United States have adopted such legislation, 45, of course, have not. ... As the Supreme Court said in the case of Nicklinson and Lamb, information from the few jurisdictions where assisted suicide is lawful is, "sensitive to underlying conditions such as standards of education, the existence of long-term relationships between GPs and patients and other social and cultural factors, which are not necessarily replicated in the United Kingdom".

So it does not necessarily follow that a law which operates effectively—allegedly—in another jurisdiction would provide an appropriate basis for such legislation in England and Wales.

We should remember that "assisted dying" is not a term that exists in law. It is shorthand for two distinct things; namely, assisting suicide and euthanasia. However one interprets the term, assisted dying is a highly emotive issue. It polarises opinion among the public, in the media and across the political spectrum, even within groups which are generally supportive of or opposed to a change in the law, and it raises the most profound ethical, moral, religious and social issues. ...

As the law stands, there is no offence—or defence—of "mercy killing"; nor is there any statutory exception to the offence of encouraging or assisting suicide under Section 2 of the Suicide Act. That Act was amended in 2009. By amending the law, Parliament confirmed that an offence should remain in respect of assisted suicide. ...

col 1187 The debate on this issue is often characterised as being a choice between legalising assisted dying on the one hand and the provision of high-quality end-of-life care on the other, but the two are not mutually exclusive. ...

col 1188 Whatever provisions may be proposed, therefore, the real question is: how much risk to the vulnerable is acceptable in order not to deny those who would genuinely wish to be assisted to commit suicide the opportunity of an assisted death? That is a very difficult balance to strike and there are no simple answers, especially when those who

are vulnerable are not necessarily easy to identify. Whatever the arguments for and against change, it is important that the ongoing debate should not lead those whose lives are affected by illness or disability to feel less valued. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2017-03-06/debates/D4662B1E-E4DA-40BF-99F1-254F2E14D8FF/AssistedDying>

House of Commons Written Answers

Internet: Hate Crime

Nusrat Ghani [65360] To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, pursuant to his answer of 25 January to question 61017, for what reasons offences committed online are not recorded and what the estimated cost of keeping such records is.

Marcus Jones: The College of Policing Hate Crime Operational Guidance, issued in 2014, makes clear that hate crimes committed online should be recorded in the same way as all others: http://www.report-it.org.uk/strategy_and_guidance.

The Home Office is responsible for the collection and publication of data on police recorded crime, including hate crime. Information on whether a crime was committed online (in full or in part) has been collected on a mandatory basis since April 2015. The Home Office plans to publish information on the proportion of police recorded hate crime that is identified as being online in their Hate Crime England and Wales 2016/17 bulletin which is due for publication in October 2017

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-23/65360/>

Social Networking: Fines

Nusrat Ghani [65479] To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of introducing fines for social media companies which fail to remove offensive and hate material from their platforms.

Marcus Jones: The Government has reached agreement through the European Commission's High-Level Group on Hate Crime with social media companies, that they should have robust processes in place to act promptly when online hate abuse is reported. This includes acting quickly to assess the report; removing content within twenty-four hours which does not comply with the acceptable use policies or terms and conditions; and, where appropriate, suspending or terminating the accounts of those breaching the rules that are in place. Collaborative efforts are ongoing to find and evaluate a range of solutions that balance free speech and protection from harm, with the potential to introduce fines if insufficient progress is made. The Government will continue to engage with social media companies and other interested parties to tackle online hate crime, as set out in our Hate Crime Action Plan.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-24/65479/>

Schools: Admissions

Roger Godsiff [65815] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether the Government has made an assessment of parents' preferences between increasing (a) faith and (b) non-faith school places.

Caroline Dinenge: The latest figures for the secondary school application round show that there is a higher demand by parents for places in faith schools in relation to offers than there is for non-faith school places. They also show that

parents' relative preferences for faith and non-faith school places have remained stable over the last 3 years.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-27/65815/>

Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Hate crime and its violent consequences

New written evidence

Traditional British Group

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/written/48054.pdf>

Scottish Government

Tackling sectarianism

Recommendations on further action to tackle sectarianism have been welcomed by the Scottish Government. ...

Community Safety Minister Annabelle Ewing said: "It is very clear from Dr Morrow's report that work remains to be done in eradicating sectarianism from sections of our society. ...

"The Scottish Government cannot eradicate sectarianism in isolation and while we are committed to taking forward the recommendations that are for us, we must also continue to work with local authorities, the third sector, community groups, football clubs and more to foster a Scotland where sectarianism is consigned to history.

"Together we can nurture a modern nation that isn't weighed down by the prejudices of the past. I will now carefully consider Dr Morrow's report and respond in due course."

To read the full press release see

<http://news.gov.scot/news/tackling-sectarianism-1>

Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00514870.pdf>

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Holocaust

UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation

Holocaust memorial designs exhibition in Parliament

An exhibition of the [shortlisted teams' designs for the National Holocaust Memorial and education centre](#) is on display and open to the public in Westminster Hall in Parliament from Monday 26 February.

The new National Holocaust Memorial and accompanying education centre will stand in Victoria Tower Gardens in the shadow of Parliament. This striking new structure will honour victims and survivors of Nazi persecution and will act as a national voice against hatred in our world today.

The [international design competition](#) sought to harness the very best architectural talent to create an emotionally powerful and sensitively designed memorial. Ninety-two teams expressed an interest in the project, with a [shortlist of 10](#) invited to submit the concept

designs on display as part of this exhibition.

Consultation with the public, survivors, those working in the field of Holocaust remembrance and education, and technical experts will play a crucial role in informing the final decision of the jury. Visitors are invited to give their views as part of the exhibition.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/holocaust-memorial-designs-exhibition-in-parliament>

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House of Commons Point of Order

Andrew Selous: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A constituent contacted me last week to tell me that a friend of his had been prevented from entering the House because he was wearing a “Free Palestine” badge. After discussion with the security staff, he removed the badge and was allowed access to Parliament, only to come across a large exhibition that featured one poster that was about Zionist diplomacy. We all respect the important work that the security staff do in keeping us safe, and we are hugely grateful to them, but I wonder whether you could give some guidance on the wearing of small badges, because my constituent is a bit confused by the situation his friend encountered.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, and for his courtesy in giving me advance notice of it. I think that it is fair to say—I say this en passant—that the presence of the poster, to which he elliptically eluded a moment ago, is irrelevant for the purpose of his point of order, because I think that it formed part of an historical exhibition. I am sure that an historical exhibition would be of great interest, possibly to the hon. Gentleman’s constituent, but almost certainly to the hon. Gentleman.

So far as the point of order is concerned, what I would say is as follows. Under what are now long-standing instructions, members of the public wishing to visit the House are not supposed to display clothing with slogans or badges that might cause controversy. Of necessity, that has to be interpreted case by case by individual members of staff, and they might get the balance wrong. For my own part—I have not been encouraged to say this, but I am entitled to say it and I intend to say it—it seems to me that we should err on the side of caution and, where possible, of non-intervention in these matters, rather than on the side of being too prescriptive or officious. I sense that that is probably the wish of the House.

I will of course convey the hon. Gentleman’s concern, which has been expressed with his usual restraint and courtesy, to the Serjeant at Arms. I hope that, in turn, the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I gently suggest to him, as I have been encouraged to do, that he could have sought such a meeting himself, rather than bringing the matter to the Chamber, but he has done so, and he has done so with fairness, and I hope that I have responded accordingly.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-06/debates/6C5C49B2-613E-4865-B5B4-385C4F936A07/PointsOfOrder#contribution-9F05EEB0-8F12-411C-8A3E-2FDE9F30C7A8>

House of Commons Written Answer

Israeli Settlements: UN Resolutions

Tommy Sheppard [65902] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to ensure implementation of UN resolution 2334 (2016).

Tobias Ellwood: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 20 January 2017 (PQ 59710).

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-28/65902/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-01-12/59710/>

It has long been our position that Israeli settlement activity is illegal and undermines the viability of two states for two peoples, but it is far from the only obstacle to peace. UN Security Council Resolution 2334 addresses settlements while also calling for an end to incitement and terror. The resolution was passed on 23 December and asks the Secretary-General to report to the Council every three months on the implementation of its provisions. We will monitor the situation closely.

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Lord Eames [HL5505] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they have had discussions with the government of the US on relations between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: The Prime Minister, my Rt Hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), and President Trump discussed a range of foreign policy issues during their meeting on 27 January.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-02-21/HL5505/>

Israel: Palestinians

Lord Eames [HL5506] To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their response to the indication of a change of policy by the government of the US on the Two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: We welcome President Trump's interest in working for a peace deal that meets the requirements of both parties. The UK's view remains that the two state solution is the best option to achieve this.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-02-21/HL5506/>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Libya: United Nations

The Marquess of Lothian [HL5513] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they supported the UN Secretary-General's proposal to appoint the former Palestinian Prime

Minister, Salam Fayyad, as his Special Representative in Libya; and if so, whether they made that support clear to the US administration.

Baroenss Anelay of St Johns: The UK supports merit based appointments by the UN. We were content with the nomination of Salam Fayyad to the role of Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Libya and had indicated our support to the UN. Mr Fayyad has a strong track record from his time as Palestinian Prime Minister. It is for the US to comment on its decision. We shall continue to support the UN's efforts in Libya and look forward to working closely with the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General once appointed.

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-02-21/HL5513/>

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee

'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaaff/967/967.pdf>

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Other Relevant Information

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

States must act now to enable people to enjoy freedom of religion, says UN expert

Countries around the world are being urged to act now to promote and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief, by a United Nations expert. ...

Mr. Shaheed expressed concern about a rise in the number of incidents of incitement to hatred, hostility, discrimination or violence based on religion or belief as well as, hate crimes by extremist groups, vigilante mobs and others.

"State and non-State actors, alike, continue to impose restrictions (or limitations) and engage in targeted harassment, intimidation of, or discrimination against religious minorities, unrecognized religious communities and dissidents, who are often confronted with threats to their freedom, safety and security," Mr. Shaheed said.

"I am particularly alarmed by continuing reports of mass atrocities and violence that threaten the very existence of religious minority communities, including some groups that have existed for over two millennia." ...

He welcomed efforts being made to promote the right to freedom of religion or belief at national and international levels by Governments, parliamentarians, national human rights institutions, human rights and faith-based organizations as well as educational institutions. ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21307&LangID=E>

Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/008/79/PDF/G1700879.pdf?OpenElement>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/arbitrationandmediationservicesequality.html>

Assisted Dying Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/assisteddying.html>

Lobbying (Transparency) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/lobbyingtransparency.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

Promotion of Israeli-Palestinian Peace (United Kingdom Participation)

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/promotionofisraelipalestinianpeaceunitedkingdomparticipation.html>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes in 7 days**

Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation: increasing numbers of successful donations (Scotland) (closing date 14 March 2017)

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00511160.pdf>

Reforming GCSEs, AS and A levels in biblical Hebrew (closing date 23 March 2017)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-gcse-as-and-a-levels-in-biblical-hebrew>

The UK's policy towards the Middle East Peace Process (closing date 30 March 2017)

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news-parliament-2015/middle-east-peace-process-inquiry-16-17/>

Adoption and Children (Northern Ireland) Bill (closing date 10 April 2017)

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/adoption-and-children-northern-ireland-bill>

Workplace Diversity (Wales) (closing date not stated)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/wtucdiversity>

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