

Political Affairs Brief

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

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<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100623/halltext/100623h0001.htm#10062332000001>

UK Parliamentary Question

War Crimes: Universal Jurisdiction

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent representations she has received on the applicability of universal jurisdiction to representatives of foreign governments accused of war crimes travelling to the UK; and what steps the Government plans to take on the matter. [3052]

Damian Green: The Home Secretary has not received representations on this matter, which is the responsibility of the Justice Secretary.

The purpose of asserting universal jurisdiction, as we have done in relation to war crimes under the Geneva Conventions Act and a few other offences of exceptional gravity, is to ensure that there is no impunity for those accused of such crimes. But it is important that universal jurisdiction cases should be taken only on the basis of solid evidence that is likely to lead to a successful prosecution, and the Government are considering how to secure that outcome.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100623/text/100623w004.htm#10062359000026>

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Israel

House of Lords Short Debate

Israel and Gaza

Lord Campbell-Savours: To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent discussions they have had about the situation in Israel and Gaza.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): ... the United Kingdom is in regular contact with the Israeli and Palestinian Governments and our international allies regarding the current

humanitarian situation in Gaza and the wider issues relating to the peace process. ...

Lord Campbell-Savours: ... in the face of threats to intervene and break the blockade by Iranian Revolutionary Guard naval units, why cannot the United Kingdom Government announce that they are prepared to challenge the blockade by providing a naval escort for a flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian aid into Gaza, aid which has been given prior clearance by the European Union ...

Lord Howell of Guildford: ... we simply do not think that that is the right way to proceed. ...

Lord Hylton: ... are there not immediate questions to be discussed with the Government of Israel concerning the ships themselves, their cargoes, now under arrest, and possibly the personal possessions of persons who have been arrested?

Lord Howell of Guildford: ... With regard to the humanitarian goods on these ships, the idea is that they should be shipped on into Gaza. However, unfortunately, it appears that the Hamas group has not been very keen on accepting all that aid at the moment. But that is the procedure that the Government of Israel are trying to adopt in the face of attempts to run the blockade or break the restrictions, which are apparently to be promoted by a number of countries, including some of the Iranian authorities.

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: Does the Minister agree that, while there is a great need to improve the access for aid and commercial goods into Gaza, it still requires any new regime allowing new materials into Gaza to take great care not to allow in weapons that might be used against Israel?

Lord Howell of Guildford: ... Israel does have the right to restrain the import of weapons, bombs and so on into the control of Hamas. At the same time, we all want to see the sufferings of the people of Gaza minimised and the maximum supplies of food, building materials, medical supplies and so on imported into Gaza. ...

Lord Dykes: ... will my noble friend confirm that the peace talks and the proximity talks are proceeding apace, despite the continuing weakness of the quartet mechanism, which is deeply disappointing to all observers? Will he reassure us that the sinister rumours that George Mitchell is less than even-handed between Israel and Palestinian lobbies are not true? ...

Lord Anderson of Swansea: The Minister must recognise that Israel has legitimate security concerns and cannot be expected to allow unfettered access. How, then, do the Government respond to the specific proposal from Bernard Kouchner that the European Union offers to provide some form of border monitoring for material entering Gaza to ensure that it is only for humanitarian purposes?

Lord Howell of Guildford: There may well be something in that idea. Of course there is the other border on the Egyptian side, which was open temporarily and has now been closed. All these matters are to be pursued to see whether we can find that key reconciliation between the need to end the suffering of the people of Gaza and Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells: ... while I recognise the appropriate need for Israel to be protected, the issue of building materials in relation to the people of Gaza is nevertheless important, given the recent campaign against Gaza involving bombing and the destruction of houses. What can Her Majesty's Government do in the interim to encourage the Israeli Government to allow building materials to go into that country? ...

Lord Howell of Guildford: ... maximum pressure and encouragement must be placed on the Government of Israel to do what is actually in their own interest, which is to minimise the restrictions, to lift the blockade as far as they can consistent with their security and to continue to expand the amount of provisions already going into Gaza from Israel as well as from Egypt. ...

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/100608-0002.htm#10060837000723>

UK Parliamentary Questions

Palestinians: International Assistance

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to ensure that aid which it sends to Gaza reaches those who need it; and if he will make a statement. [3488]

Mr Duncan: The UK does not send aid directly to Gaza. However, we do fund the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which provides basic services to Gazan refugees such as education, health care and food aid.

Due to restrictions on access UNRWA and other aid organisations have found it difficult to import into Gaza all the items they need to carry out their work effectively. DFID is therefore funding a United Nations team to work with the Government of Israel and aid agencies to facilitate the transfer of goods into Gaza. The announcement by the Government of Israel of an easing of restrictions, including a move from a list of permitted items to a list of banned goods, is a step in the right direction. We will continue to press the Government of Israel to ensure they deliver on their commitments.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100623/text/100623w0013.htm#10062364000033>

Gaza

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had about the reasons for the closing of the two main branches of the Arab Bank in the Gaza Strip.[HL4]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford): We are aware of these closures, but have not had discussions with the Arab Bank regarding its decision to close branches in the Gaza Strip.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/100608w0002.htm#10060835000165>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Robert Halfon (304) Gilad Shalit - That this House notes that 25 June 2010 is the fourth anniversary of the kidnap of Israeli serviceman Gilad Shalit by Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in a cross-border terrorist attack inside Israel; is concerned that Gilad Shalit is being held incommunicado and is neither permitted to send nor receive messages from his family; further notes that despite repeated requests the International Committee of the Red Cross continues to be denied access to the kidnapped soldier; further notes that the soldier's continued detention is an obstacle to peace between Israelis and Palestinians; condemns the kidnapping of Corporal Gilad Shalit; and calls on the Government to redouble its efforts to secure his release.

<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=41238&SESSION=905>

Welsh Assembly Debate

Gaza

includes

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: ... I move that the National Assembly for Wales: 1. notes the concerns raised in Wales regarding the Israeli interception of the Free Gaza flotilla, and deeply regrets the loss of life resulting from this action; 2. believes that these events must be investigated by a full, credible, impartial and independent inquiry; and 3. notes the widespread support in Wales for the United Nations Security Council resolution no. 1860. (NDM4494)

Sometimes, though rarely, there is a responsibility on the Assembly to debate international affairs in the Chamber. ... That is true of the raid by the Israeli navy on boats that were trying to get humanitarian assistance to Gaza. ... there is strong feeling in Wales that there needs to be an independent inquiry into these events. ... if you recall, in early 2009, there was an attack on Palestine by Israeli forces that killed over 1,000 Palestinians, including 300 children. Nine Israelis were killed in the attack, and although any loss of life is regrettable, one must be proportionate. ... The issue here is proportionality with regard to the way in which the Israeli state acted in this recent attack on the flotilla and the consequential loss of life, in the earlier attack in 2009, and in the way that the Palestinians in the Gaza strip have been under siege and have not been able to acquire even the basic requirements of everyday life. ... there was no bitterness among the Palestinian people; all they want is justice. Therefore, I believe that what we are trying to do in this debate is to echo that call for justice, and there is a strong feeling of support in Wales for the Palestinian cause because of that. ...

Darren Millar: I warmly welcomed the announcement by Israel on Monday, 15 June of an internal inquiry into the unfortunate events on the Mavi Marmara. This panel of three leading Israeli legal officials will be overseen by two international observers and this is being granted considerable investigative powers. The presence of the former First Minister of Northern Ireland, Lord David Trimble, is particularly commendable. ... I do not doubt or question the fact that there is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, but we are now witnessing in Israel the beginning of a process of identifying ways to ensure that even larger amounts of aid reach the Gaza strip. ... The British Government ought to be actively supporting Israel in its efforts to stop the blockade, rather than demanding that all borders are opened indiscriminately. We need to begin to understand the complexities of Israel's predicament. Israel is straddling a line between humanitarian responsibility and real concerns about its national security. The international community, instead of grandstanding on the issue, should take steps to help to provide real solutions to the problem of smuggling arms into Gaza. ... Terrorists also continue to infiltrate Israel from Gaza via complex tunnelling systems to execute some horrific terror attacks. These are the very same tunnels that enable Hamas to illegally smuggle the weapons and explosives supplied by the backers of the Hamas regime—Iran and Syria—to be used against Israeli citizens and territory. To those who argue that Hamas should be brought into the fold of the international community, I say, 'Do not be so naïve'. Hamas does not want peace with Israel or the west, it blatantly violates security council resolutions and it colludes with the rogue states of Syria and Iran. ...

Alun Davies: ... I do not like Hamas as an organisation. I do not like what it stands for or the philosophy that underpins it. I have spoken to people who support it, and I have not found them to be people with whom I feel entirely comfortable, to be quite frank with you. Some of the things that they say about the Jewish people and the Israeli state are wholly unacceptable, and I think that it is an act of terrible naivety on the part of many people on the left, I must say, to believe that it is a group of freedom fighters. It is not. Hamas is as opposed to the way we live here as it is to the Israeli state. ... However, that does not allow the Israeli state to get away with some of the most brutal war crimes known in recent times. ... When I see states such as Iran seeking to have nuclear weapons, the real prospect of another Jewish holocaust is horrible and we must stand firmly against that. However, at the same time, we cannot allow the Israeli state to act as a war criminal and get away with some of the most brutalising examples of action against a civilian population. ...

Mohammad Asghar: ... I come from that part of the world. Pakistan and Israel are built on the basis of religion, and they have a full right to exist. Israel has a democratically elected Government, and it is the only such country in the world to be surrounded by countries that are, unfortunately, not democratic ... Hamas is an organisation that is only recognised in that part of the world. Who is financing it? ...if every nation in the world guaranteed today the safety and security of Israel, I guarantee that, tomorrow morning, everything would be hunky-dory in that part of the world, and maybe prosperity would

come. Why is everything going to one side? I know that the United Nations Security Council has, under resolution 1860, already approved plans to make it easier for Palestinians to travel home from overseas to live happily, but when will they give a guarantee in return? They have produced missiles, rockets and all sorts. There is no difference between spilling an Israeli child's blood and a Palestinian child's blood. It is exactly the same. Why do we not propose a motion to stress strongly that Palestinians should at least recognise Israel? They should recognise Israel, and there should be a guarantee of its security. I can assure you that there would be no need for tunnels or anything else then. The border would be open and they could get on with living their lives. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=188210&ds=6/2010#8>

Council of Europe

PACE calls on Israel to lift its blockade of Gaza

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) today called on Israel to lift its blockade of Gaza "without prejudice to its own security". In a resolution adopted by a large majority following an urgent debate, the Assembly welcomed the announcement of a partial easing of the blockade as a "first step", but said there should be access by land and sea to allow in the goods necessary for "normal living conditions" and to permit economic development. ... It called on Israel to co-operate fully with the international community to ensure a "prompt, international, impartial and transparent enquiry" into what happened. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR513%282010%29&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE>

Resolution adopted

Resolution 1748 (2010)

The Parliamentary Assembly ... considers the Israeli raid, which took place in international waters, an illegal act constituting a breach of international law ... t underlines that the living conditions of the people of Gaza have become increasingly harsh as a result of the blockade imposed on them ... The Assembly ... underlines that the conflict in the Middle East above all concerns two equally legitimate aspirations – Israel's right to be recognised and to exist in safety and the Palestinians' right to have an independent, viable and contiguous state ... The Assembly therefore urges the Government of Israel to: determine rapidly and unequivocally individual and collective responsibilities for acts relating to the attack against the flotilla to Gaza; ... ensure that the Enquiry Commission it has appointed carries out a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent enquiry ... lift the blockade of Gaza, ... nsure that the President of the Palestinian National Authority Mahmoud Abbas and the Fayad Government are in a position to assume their responsibilities and exercise their powers; ... The Assembly urges all Palestinian forces to recognise the authority of President Mahmoud Abbas and support the peace process. It calls on Hamas to: recognise the right of the State of Israel to exist, as well as endorse the Arab Peace Plan; stop the launching of rockets at Israeli targets and to renounce explicitly all violent forms of struggle; stop attacks against international NGOs in Gaza; allow the Red Cross to immediately visit the soldier Gilad Shalit; release soldier Gilad Shalit. ... It urges Fatah and Hamas to resume negotiations for an agreement consistent with the goal of a negotiated peace. ...

To read the full text of the resolution see

<http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta10/ERES1748.htm>

United Nations

Ban voices deep concern at municipal plan to demolish homes in East Jerusalem

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced deep concern at the news that the municipality of Jerusalem has advanced planning for the demolition of existing homes and the construction of further settlements in the Silwan area in the east of the city. "The planned moves are contrary to international law, and to the wishes of Palestinian residents," Mr. Ban said yesterday in a statement issued by his spokesperson. "The Secretary-General reminds the Israeli Government of its responsibility to ensure provocative steps are not taken which would heighten tensions in the city. The current moves are unhelpful, coming at a time when the goal must be to build trust to support political negotiations." ...

To read the full press release see

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35124&Cr=Palestin&Cr1=>

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Relevant Legislation ** New or updated

UK Parliament

**** Academies Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/academieshl.html>

Committee Stage, House of Lords

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/100623-0002.htm#10062341000492>

Notice of amendments

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldbills/001/amend/su001-iira.htm>

Identity Documents Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/identitydocuments.html>

Scottish Parliament

End of Life Assistance Bill

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/38-EndLifeAssist/index.htm>

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Consultations ** new or updated

**** closes in 7 days**

Reform of the coroner system (closes 1 July 2010)

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/reform-coroner-system.htm>

Identity Documents Bill (Committee consideration to be completed by 8 July)

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2010/06/identity-documents-bill-committee-issues-call-for-evidence/>

Equality Act: obtaining information in potential discrimination and equality of term cases (closes 13 July 2010)

http://www.equalities.gov.uk/news/new_streamlined_procedure_for.aspx

Amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 (closes 15 July 2010)
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2010-pathogens-toxins/consultation-paper2835.pdf?view=Binary>

Welsh Assembly Review of Standing Orders (closes 16 July 2010)
http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-bc-home/bus-committees-third-bc-comm/bc3_inq_so.htm

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