



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Commons Oral Answer

#### Business of the House

**Matthew Offord (Conservative):** I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business. I, for one, am very pleased with its contents. Last year saw a record number of antisemitic allegations, which the chief executive of the Community Security Trust has blamed on antisemitic politics and the deliberate exclusion of Jews from anti-racist norms. May I therefore thank the Leader of the House for granting a debate in Government time, so that we can see what the Government are doing to address the problem of antisemitism and how we can remove this scourge from our party politics?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am delighted to have been able to announce a debate on antisemitism for next week. It is incredibly distressing to see cases of antisemitism on the rise in this country, and it must stop. Antisemitism is despicable and it has no place in society. What I can say to my hon. Friend is that the Leader of the Opposition's own MPs tabled and unanimously passed a motion last week calling on the party leadership to adequately tackle cases of antisemitism, as a failure to do so seriously risks antisemitism in the Labour party appearing normalised and the party seeming to be institutionally antisemitic.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-02-14/debates/F3F9CC25-D033-4FCB-8D3B-2D6BA201D411/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-E7E5340E-3A61-43E9-BAB7-641B93DC477D>

*The debate referred to above will take place on Wednesday 20 February*

### House of Lords Oral Answers

#### Assisted Suicide

**Baroness Blackstone (Independent Labour):** To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of Geoffrey Whaley's case, what assessment they have made of the Crown Prosecution Service's Policy for Prosecutors in respect of Cases of Encouraging or Assisting Suicide.

**The Advocate-General for Scotland (Lord Keen of Elie):** My Lords, CPS policy on assisted suicide provides guidance to prosecutors on assessing the evidential and public interest stages in reaching decisions in cases of encouraging or assisting suicide. The policy sets out the public interest factors that must be applied in reaching decisions in these cases and balances the various important factors that need to be considered. There are no plans to reassess the CPS policy in relation to such cases.

**Baroness Blackstone:** I thank the Minister for his reply, but does he really think that it is a good use of police time to interview, under caution, the wife of a dying man who wishes to choose how he dies? In the light of the Whaley story and loving families being treated like criminals, does the Minister think that the law on assisted dying is working well?

**Lord Keen of Elie:** My Lords, it is for the CPS to apply the law, not to make the law. Every case has to turn on its own facts and circumstances. Where matters are drawn to the attention of the police relating to an assisted suicide or potential assisted suicide, they will investigate. They are bound to investigate what is potentially criminal conduct in terms of Section 2 of the Suicide Act 1961. I therefore see no reason why they should pause those investigations, given the current state of the law.

**Lord Pannick (Crossbench):** Does the Minister recall that the CPS policy was adopted after the decision of the Appellate Committee of this House in 2009 in the Debbie Purdy case—I declare an interest as her counsel. The Appellate Committee required a policy because of the uncertainty of the law. Does the Minister accept that there continues to be considerable uncertainty in this area, as indicated by the Question of the noble Baroness, Lady Blackstone, which is causing enormous distress to those at the end of their lives and their families?

**Lord Keen of Elie:** The noble Lord is quite right that a consultation was prompted by a decision of the courts in England and Wales. That led to a consultation exercise that commenced in September 2009, to which there were more than 5,000 responses, and resulted in the publication of the CPS policy document in 2010. I consider that that policy is working well at the present time.

**Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Conservative):** My Lords, does my noble and learned friend understand—I am sure he does—that, for people with a terminal illness who have no hope of recovery and are suffering great distress, the current law, which prevents them being able to end their own lives in dignity, is condemning them to great and unnecessary suffering?

**Lord Keen of Elie:** We are of course conscious of the difficulties and challenges facing people in the situation that the noble Lord has outlined, but I emphasise again that it is for the CPS to apply the law, not to make the law. In doing so, it follows a policy that addresses not only an evidential test but a public interest test with regard to such cases. The consequence is that, of the 140-odd cases referred in the last nine years to the CPS, there were prosecutions in respect of Section 2 of the Suicide Act 1961 in only four of them, resulting in one acquittal and three convictions.

**Lord Low of Dalston (Crossbench):** My Lords, as the noble and learned Lord has implied, the police are only enforcing the law, so it is really the law that is the problem rather than the police. When will the Government bring in a new law to free the police from having to treat loving families like criminals?

**Lord Keen of Elie:** My Lords, it is not a case of having to treat loving families like criminals. It is a matter of having to look at the facts and circumstances of every case, in situations where the victim may be extremely vulnerable. As the Government have said before, it is therefore a matter for Parliament because it is a matter of conscience. It is not a matter for government to bring forward such legislation. The noble Lord will be aware that such legislation was proposed in 2015

and did not succeed.

**Baroness Barker (Liberal Democrat):** My Lords, given the statistics which the noble and learned Lord has just quoted, does he not consider that that in itself is an indication that the law is not working properly?

**Lord Keen of Elie:** No, I do not. As I say, only in a small minority of cases has there been a successful prosecution. I should also add, however, that there have been a number of instances in which the case taken forward involved prosecution for homicide, not assisted suicide.

**Baroness Meacher (Crossbench):** My Lords, indeed Geoff Whaley did die a dignified death in Switzerland last Thursday, but most people cannot afford to take their family to Switzerland for such a death, or they cannot get the medical report from their doctor to enable them to have such a death. Does the Minister agree that, in a civilised society, someone in Geoff Whaley's position should be able to avoid months of being unable to swallow, eat, drink, speak or move—totally, therefore, cut off from communication? Will the Minister discuss with his colleagues what can be done to change the law?

**Lord Keen of Elie:** It is not the intention of the Government to seek to change the law in this area. I emphasise that every case has to be considered according to its own particular facts and circumstances. I readily acknowledge that many of these cases are extremely tragic.

**Baroness Chakrabarti (Labour):** My Lords, whatever the conflicting views—and there are many—on public and prosecutorial policy in this area, I hope we can all agree that the current situation presents loved ones of people with motor neurone disease and similar conditions at the end of their lives with an emotional, ethical and legal minefield. Is the Minister confident that these people, at a very difficult time, are getting the advice and support they need to navigate that?

**Lord Keen of Elie:** I am not in a position to say where such people seek advice on these matters, but such advice is available, and the policy of the CPS with regard to this matter is publicly available.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-02-14/debates/8A37BC80-9106-4B07-B6A4-18325FE57310/AssistedSuicide>

*The CPS policy referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/suicide-policy-prosecutors-respect-cases-encouraging-or-assisting-suicide>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Oral Answer

#### Business of the House

**Joan Ryan (Labour):** The Government have supported the concept of an international fund for Israel-Palestine to promote the values of co-existence, reconciliation and peace. The evidence is robust that these projects bring together people, build resilience and build constituencies for peace. May we have an early debate on how the Government can make progress on the support they have given to this idea so far?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Lady raises the very valuable work that is being done to try to resolve some of the issues on the ground between Israel and Palestine, and it is absolutely vital that we continue to do all we in the UK can to promote peace and justice in that area. She will be aware that we have Foreign Office questions on Tuesday 26 February, when I would encourage her to discuss it with Ministers.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-02-14/debates/F3F9CC25-D033-4FCB-8D3B-2D6BA201D411/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-1E76BBAE-94C1-4A12-A3DD-06E81FE57AD7>

## House of Commons Written Answers

### Omar Shakir

**Richard Burden (Labour)** [218170] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 30 January to Question 212311, whether he has made an assessment of the potential effect of the deportation by Israel of Human Rights Watch country director Omar Shakir on the effectiveness of work to defend human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; and if he will again make representations on the case of Mr Shakir to the Israeli authorities.

**Alistair Burt:** The UK remains concerned about the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). We have a regular dialogue with the Government of Israel on the implementation of its obligations under international law. We regularly and robustly raise any concerns about Israeli actions and call upon Israeli Government to fully respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of human rights defenders and organisations and to allow them to freely operate in Israel and OPTs.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-02-07/218170/>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-01-24/212311/>

### Jerusalem: Palestinians

**Richard Burden (Labour)** [218171] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make representations to the Israeli authorities on the forced eviction of 45 members of the Sabbagh family from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah district of East Jerusalem.

**Alistair Burt:** We continue to be gravely concerned by the impact of demolitions and evictions on ordinary Palestinians and the viability of a future Palestinian state. Our Ambassador to Israel raised our concerns about evictions in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem with the Israeli authorities on 29 January. On 21 January, our Consul General in Jerusalem and other EU Heads of Mission visited the home of the Sabbagh family. In a follow-up statement, the EU repeated its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and related actions, including evictions and demolitions, and made clear how such measures were illegal under international law and continued to undermine the viability of a two-state solution. In her intervention at the United Nations Security Council's open debate on the Middle East on 22 January, the UK Permanent Representative to the UN encouraged Israel not to enforce the eviction notice.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-02-07/218171/>

*The intervention referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/durable-peace-in-the-middle-east>

### Israel: Refugees

**John Hayes (Conservative)** [218179] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he holds information on the number of refugees that Israel has accepted in the last 10 years.

**Alistair Burt:** We do not hold that information.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-02-07/218179/>

## House of Lords Written Answers

### Middle East: Armed Conflict

**Lord Shinkwin (Conservative)** [HL13468] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the implications for regional stability in the Middle East of an Iranian missile fired in January from Damascus towards northern Israel.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We fully support Israel's right to defend itself. We urge Iran to refrain from actions which will only lead to increased instability in the region. It is crucial to avoid any further escalations, which would be in no one's interest.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-05/HL13468/>

### Lebanon: Israel

**Lord Shinkwin (Conservative)** [HL13469] To ask Her Majesty's Government what reports, if any, they have received of the construction of cross-border tunnels by Hezbollah militants from Lebanon into Israel.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The British Government is aware of reports of the construction of cross-border tunnels from Lebanon into Israel. The UN Monitoring Mission, UNIFIL, confirmed a violation of UNSCR 1701 to the UN Security Council on 19 December 2018. We urge the newly formed Lebanese Government to take necessary steps to ensure any violations of 1701 are addressed.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-05/HL13469/>

### Gaza: Israel

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL13483] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 28 January (HL12818), what assessment they have made of the operation of the buffer zone in Gaza and whether the area covered by such a zone needs to be made clearer; and whether they will make representations to the government of Israel to this effect.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We have made no assessment of the buffer zone and have not discussed this issue with the Government of Israel.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-05/HL13483/>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-01-14/HL12818/>

### Israel: Palestinians

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL13540] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 28 January (HL12817), what steps they intend to take to uphold the freedom of the media in the Occupied Territories.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The British Government recognizes that protection of the freedom of the media is an important attribute of human rights. Officials at the British Consulate Jerusalem routinely raise issues of media freedom with the Palestinian Authority, and the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa met Leaders of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate in London on 4 July 2018 where they discussed the situation facing Palestinian journalists and the constraints on their work.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-06/HL13540/>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-01-14/HL12817/>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Israel: Palestinians**

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL13541] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports of Israeli forces shooting at unarmed Palestinian boys on 25 January, resulting in the death of Ayman Hamad; whether they intend to take action in response; if so, what; if not, why not; and whether they have made representations to the government of Israel about that shooting.

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL13542] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports of Israeli forces using live rounds against schoolchildren who protested those forces invading school grounds; whether they intend to take action in response; if so, what; if not, why not; and whether they have made representations on the issue to the government of Israel.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We are very concerned at the high numbers of Palestinians killed by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the West Bank and Gaza. We have raised the issue with the Israeli authorities, encouraging them to carry out transparent investigations into whether the use of live fire has been appropriate. The UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the IDF polices protests and the border areas, including use of live ammunition. We will continue to do so.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-06/HL13541/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-06/HL13542/>

#### **Israel: Sewage**

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL13543] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the level of sewage pollution in the Mediterranean off the coast of Israel; and what advice they provide to UK tourists who plan to visit Israel about such pollution.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We have not raised this specific issue with the Israeli authorities and we do not provide advice to UK tourists about pollution. There remains an urgent need for all the parties to reach an agreement that addresses the underlying causes of conflict in Gaza and to take the necessary steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-06/HL13543/>

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## Foreign Affairs

### House of Commons Written Answer

#### Religious Freedom

**Marion Fellows (SNP)** [219490] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to protect religious minorities and religious expression around the world.

**Mark Field:** The Government is deeply concerned about the severity of violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in many parts of the world. It is a universal human right for all people to be able to practise their faith or belief without fear or discrimination. Freedom of Religion or Belief is an important part of the work done by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We regularly raise issues at ministerial and senior official levels where we have concerns, including the right of Freedom of Religion or Belief at the Human Rights Council.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-02-11/219490/>

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## Relevant Legislation

\*\* new or updated today

### UK Parliament

#### **Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill**

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/holocaustreturnofculturalobjectsamendment.html>

#### **International Development Assistance (Palestinian National Authority Schools) Bill**

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/internationaldevelopmentassistancepalestiniannationalauthoritieschools.html>

#### **Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

#### **Online Forums Bill**

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/onlineforums.html>

#### **Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

#### **Palestinian Statehood (Recognition) Bill**

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/palestinianstatehoodrecognition.html>

### Scottish Parliament

#### **Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill**

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108681.aspx>

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## Consultations

\*\* new or updated today

### **\*\* closes today**

**Draft guidance to challenge bullying in schools** [Wales only] (closing date 15 February 2019)  
<https://beta.gov.wales/draft-guidance-challenge-bullying-schools>

### **\*\* closes in 9 days**

**One Scotland: Hate Has No Home Here** (closing date 24 February 2019)  
<https://consult.gov.scot/hate-crime/consultation-on-scottish-hate-crime-legislation/>

**Racial harassment in higher education** (closing date 28 February 2019)  
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/inquiries-and-investigations/racial-harassment-higher-education-our-inquiry>

**Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission – Draft Strategic Plan 2019-22**  
(closing date 15 March 2019)  
<http://www.nihrc.org/news/detail/ni-human-rights-commission-draft-strategic-plan-2019-2022-consultation>

**Scottish charity law** (closing date 1 April 2019)  
<https://tinyurl.com/y9ln88df>

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