

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Business of the House

Bob Blackman (Conservative): This House has rightly concentrated a substantial amount of time on debating measures to combat antisemitism, but we should abhor all racism, racial hatred and religious hatred. It is now time for a proper debate on a definition of Islamophobia. The all-party group on Islamophobia has come up with a working proposal, on which it is consulting, but that has drawn criticism from a large number of faith communities. It is time for the Government to come forward with a proposal so that we have a clear definition that everyone can support. May we have a debate on this in Government time so that we can reach some solid conclusions on which the whole House can agree?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right to raise our disgust at any form of racial or religious hatred or disadvantage. The APPG that he mentions has a very interesting proposition and I am sure that he will find a way to bring that to the attention of Ministers so that we can see what progress can be made.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-02-28/debates/BC716A05-71F7-48A9-8FF9-E7C194CCE952/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-4794F253-E99E-4FB4-BC45-43E06D3351F0>

House of Commons Written Answer

Slaughterhouses: Animal Welfare

Laurence Robertson (Conservative) [220058] To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will bring forward legislative proposals to ban the non-stun slaughter of animals; and if he will make a statement.

David Rutley: The Government encourages the highest standards of animal welfare and would prefer all animals to be stunned before slaughter, but respects the rights of Jews and Muslims to eat meat prepared in accordance with their beliefs.

The European Council Regulation 1099/2009, on the protection of animals at the time of killing sets out the main requirements for slaughter including a requirement that all animals are stunned by a permitted method before slaughter. The EU Regulation includes a derogation from stunning for religious slaughter but also allows individual Member States to impose stricter national rules for religious slaughter. In England, The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (WATOK) enforce the EU requirements and contain stricter national rules that apply when animals are slaughtered by either the Jewish or Muslim method. The Government is committed to maintaining a derogation from stunning for religious slaughter in our domestic legislation once we leave the EU.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-02-12/220058/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Islamic Ceremony: Civil Marriage Registration

Baroness Cox (Crossbench): To ask Her Majesty's Government, following Resolution 2253 (2019) passed on 22 January by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, what plans they have to review the Marriage Act 1949 to make it a legal requirement for Muslim couples to civilly register their marriage before, or at the same time as, their Islamic ceremony.

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Lord Keen of Elie): My Lords, we recognise that the noble Baroness, Lady Cox, has brought a number of proposals for reform to the House. We are aware of Resolution 2253 from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. We remain committed to exploring the legal and practical challenges of limited reform relating to the law on marriage and religious weddings, as outlined in the Government's recently published *Integrated Communities Action Plan*.

Baroness Cox: My Lords, I thank the Minister for his reply and his reference to the fact that I have introduced Private Member's Bills for eight consecutive years in an attempt to highlight the suffering from gender discrimination in the application of sharia law of many Muslim women, many of whom have come to me desperate, destitute and even suicidal, with no rights following asymmetrical divorce inflicted by their husbands. Therefore, while I welcome Her Majesty's Government's commitment to explore the legal and practical challenges of marriage reform, I ask the Minister for an assurance that this legislation will be introduced as a matter of great urgency, as so many women are now suffering in this country in ways that would make the suffragettes turn in their graves.

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, we share the noble Baroness's concern that some may feel compelled to accept decisions made informally, such as those made by religious councils. But marriage is a complex area of law and the issues will require careful consideration. We intend to explore those, as I indicated. Where sharia councils exist, for example, they must abide by the law. Where there is a conflict with national law and the court is asked to adjudicate, national law will always prevail.

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Labour): My Lords, almost two-thirds of Muslim women married in the UK are not legally married and, as the Prime Minister has acknowledged, after divorce may be subject to penury, so what will the Government do? This is not discriminatory because the independent review suggests only that sharia courts also have a civil component, or at least there is a parallel civil ceremony, that puts Muslim women on the same basis as Jewish and Christian women. A year has passed since the independent review. Why will the Government not protect these very vulnerable Muslim women?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, we are concerned that these people should be protected. The decision to go through with what is sometimes termed a nikah ceremony is widespread and unfortunately it does not give rise to a lawful marriage in England and Wales. But, as from April, we are taking forward detailed work to determine the best course of action to address such issues.

Baroness Berridge (Conservative): My Lords, recent High Court decisions show that this is an issue that affects religious ceremonies generally, but such ceremonies are marriages under UK criminal law if they are forced marriages. However, a victim of a forced religious marriage can then be left destitute as there are no remedies that follow to get access to the matrimonial property—unfortunately, Parliament left that gap. So can my noble friend please outline when this injustice will be remedied, as it is certainly a barrier to victims of forced marriage coming forward if they face destitution because they cannot get hold of their rightful matrimonial property?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, I must make it clear that the offence of forced marriage does not give legal recognition to marriages but is intended to protect victims from this abhorrent practice, regardless of the validity or otherwise of the marriage. Access to financial orders available on divorce depends on whether or not there has been a legally void or dissolved marriage and is governed by an entirely separate legal regime.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, marriage is not just some romantic notion of happily ever after—after 25 years of marriage, I have learned that it is much more than that. It gives protections and rights that should be available to all couples regardless of whether or not they are religious. But these Muslim women, who believe that they are legally wed, may not find out that they do not have the protections of the law until far too late. That is why the requirement for a civil ceremony as well, as recommended by the Home Office's own independent review last year, is so important. Is it not high time now for a fundamental review of the Marriage Act 1949 to recognise all forms of marriage in the 21st century?

Lord Keen of Elie: The general proposition that we should recognise all forms of marriage raises issues in itself. Our marriage law actually goes back to Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753 rather than just to 1949. It is a complex area that we will consider from the spring onwards and in which we will have to move with care. But we cannot simply recognise all informal types of marriage. We have a basic marriage law in this country based on the place in which it is celebrated and the fact that that place is open to the public and that it should be witnessed. We cannot move away from that. Indeed, to do so would create other issues and problems for ourselves.

Lord Green of Deddington (Crossbench): My Lords, we all recognise that this is a very complex issue, as the Minister has said. I pay tribute to the efforts of my noble friend Lady Cox, who has been on this case for years and years. Does the Minister not recognise that literally tens of thousands of women are in a very disadvantaged position? The Government produce one excuse after another but when will they actually take some effective action to end this outrageous situation?

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, there is a very real issue out there and it has to do with education and information as much as anything else. Many vulnerable people are not aware of what is required for a valid marriage ceremony in England and Wales. Therefore, we must address that issue—I accept that. But simply to move in the direction of recognising, for example, the nikah form of ceremony creates very real difficulties in itself. To take one example, how will you then police the issue of sham marriages?

Lord Cormack: My Lords, as one who has attended a number of meetings arranged by the noble Baroness and wishes to salute her courage and persistence, I ask my noble and learned friend on the Front Bench to try to inject a sense of urgency here. It is all very well

saying, "We have considered it", and "We will look at it". We need action. It is a complicated subject but we need some real urgency here.

Lord Keen of Elie: My Lords, following the Government's *Integrated Communities Action Plan*, we are going to take forward an analysis of policy objectives in this area and detailed work will be carried out.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-02-28/debates/9E6C7E1B-4462-47F4-A769-2546C5524403/IslamicCeremonyCivilMarriageRegistration>

The Council of Europe Resolution referred to above can be read at

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=25353>

The Action Plan referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-communities-action-plan>

Home Office

Hizballah banned in the UK

An [order laid in Parliament](#) on Monday (25 February) to proscribe the terrorist organisations Hizballah, Ansaroul Islam and Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam Wal-Muslimin (JNIM) has now come into effect, following debates in the Houses of Parliament.

Under the Terrorism Act 2000, being a member – or inviting support for – these groups will be a criminal offence, carrying a sentence of up to 10 years' imprisonment.

All three groups have been assessed as being concerned in terrorism.

Announcing his decision on Monday, Home Secretary Sajid Javid said: My priority as Home Secretary is to protect the British people. As part of this, we identify and ban any terrorist organisation which threatens our safety and security, whatever their motivations or ideology which is why I am taking action against several organisations today.

Hizballah is continuing in its attempts to destabilise the fragile situation in the Middle East – and we are no longer able to distinguish between their already banned military wing and the political party. Because of this, I have taken the decision to proscribe the group in its entirety. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizballah-banned-in-the-uk>

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

Israeli Settlements

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13803] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the government of Israel about the reported intention of the Israeli Minister for Tourism to settle one million more settlers in the West Bank.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are concerned by the reports in question. We regularly raise our concerns on settlements with the Government of Israel and urge it to reverse its policy of settlement expansion. We consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-18/HL13803/>

Jerusalem: Evictions

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13804] To ask Her Majesty's Government what protection they will give to the Palestinian families living in Sheik Jarrah in East Jerusalem who are facing eviction to make way for Israeli settlers.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We continue to be gravely concerned by the impact of demolitions and evictions on ordinary Palestinians and the impact this has on 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. Demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians; call into question Israel's commitment to a viable two-state solution; and, in all but the most exceptional of cases, are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. We fund a number of projects to monitor and report on settlement expansion in East Jerusalem and the West Bank and to protect vulnerable Palestinian communities from the effects of settlement expansion.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-18/HL13804/>

Israeli Settlements

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13805] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they will make to the government of Israel following reports that settlers have invaded the village of Tuqu' and set up a new settlement outpost under the protection of Israeli forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of recent reports of violence in the village of Tuqu' east of Bethlehem. We regularly raise our concerns on this issue with the Government of Israel and urge it to reverse its policy of settlement expansion. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and to take all measures in its power to protect the Palestinian population from all acts of violence.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-18/HL13805/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13806] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will make representations to the government of Israel about reports of Palestinian residents in the Jordan Valley being forcibly displaced as a result of Israeli military using that area to conduct training drills.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are aware of media reports that Palestinian families have been evacuated from the Jordan Valley because of Israeli military drills. While we are clear that Israel has the right to defend itself, we continue to raise concerns about Israel's conduct of the occupation and consistently call for an immediate end to all actions that make peace more difficult to achieve.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-18/HL13806/>

Gaza: Climate Change

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13807] To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the government of Israel regarding the effects of climate change on Gaza, in particular the impact of ocean acidification and deoxygenation.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not raised this issue with the Israeli authorities. The impacts of climate change are already being felt across the Middle East including in the marine environment, and will become much worse over time. That is why climate change and the implementation of the Paris Agreement is such

a high priority for this Government.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-18/HL13807/>

Ibrahim Dahbour

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13808] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the arrest of Palestinian MP Ibrahim Dahbour who has recently been released from administrative detention; what representations they have made to the government of Israel in response to his arrest; and what action they intend to take as a result of any such representations.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not made any representations to the Israeli authorities on this specific issue. We remain concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary rather than as routine practice and as a preventive rather than a punitive measure. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law and either charge or release detainees.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-18/HL13808/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13879] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 11 February (HL13266), how they measure whether Israeli authorities are deploying security measures appropriately and legitimately; what assessment they have made of whether the actions of Israeli forces at the Al Khader stadium was an appropriate and legitimate response; and on what evidence they based their decision not to raise the case at the Al Khader stadium with the government of Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We continue to encourage Israel to abide by its obligations under International Humanitarian Law. We have not made an assessment of the incident at the Al Khader stadium, but do raise our concerns with the Israeli authorities about Israel's use of live fire and deterrence methods used when responding to protests. We continue to support independent and transparent investigations into instances when there have been accusations of the excessive use of force.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-19/HL13879/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-01-29/HL13266/>

Israel: Gaza

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13880] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 28 January (HL12818), how many Palestinians, including farmers and fishermen, living in Gaza have been (1) injured, and (2) killed in the buffer zone in the last five years; what assessment they have made of the impact on the number of those who are injured and killed of the buffer zone area being regularly changed by the Israeli military; and whether they intend to make representations to the government of Israel about such changes so that citizens can avoid inadvertently entering that zone.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We do not hold figures for Palestinians who have been killed or injured in the buffer zone. We regularly raise with Israel our concerns

about its use of live fire in Gaza, and urge them to reduce restrictions, including reducing movement and access restrictions and expanding the fishing zone.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-19/HL13880/>

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: West Bank

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13881] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the likelihood of the annexation of the West Bank by Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We regularly raise our concerns with Israel about their policy of settlement expansion in the West Bank. It undermines the prospect of a two-state solution, and we are clear that any plans for annexation are unacceptable. We raised our concerns at the UN Security Council at 20 February.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-19/HL13881/>

Israel: Gaza

Baroness tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL13882] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to raise the use of the Responsibility to Protect in order to end the siege in Gaza and to protect Gaza's civilians at the next UN Security Council; and if not, why not.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is fully committed to the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). We do not intend to raise this in the context of Gaza, but do regularly raise the importance of improving the situation in Gaza, including at the UN Security Council on 20 February.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-19/HL13882/>

Scottish Parliament Motion

S5M-16080 Sandra White (SNP): Israeli Government Withdraws Hebron Task Force –

That the Parliament notes with concern the decision by the Israeli Government to withdraw the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), which is the observatory task force that has been monitoring the divided West Bank city of Hebron for more than 20 years; understands that the TIPH assumed its duties in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 904, which was submitted to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories; believes that correspondence from the Hebron Municipality indicates that the withdrawal of the TIPH has resulted in an increase in the frequency of violations and harassment of Palestinian civilians living in the H2 area of the city, and calls on the Israeli Government to reverse this decision and to resume the mandate for the TIPH to provide safety and protection for the Palestinian population.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-16080>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Religious Freedom

Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat) [HL13913] To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of their current review of the global persecution of Christians, whether they will consider commissioning similar reviews about other religions or belief groups.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have no plans to commission independent reviews on other groups at this time. The persecution or discrimination against all faiths or beliefs remains of profound concern to us and we remain committed to standing up for Freedom of Religion or Belief all over the world. We will continue to work with faith leaders and civil society organisations to tackle discrimination and persecution and to promote the value and benefit - to individuals, communities and wider society - of religious freedom and mutual respect.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-20/HL13913/>

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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

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