



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8409/CBP-8409.pdf>

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House of Commons Written Answer

Gaza: Israel

Caroline Lucas (Green) [223980] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he has had discussions with his counterpart in Israel on the concerns raised by Physicians for Human Rights Israel that cancer patients in Gaza continue to have their permits for travel in order to receive treatment withheld by the Israeli Government; and if he will make a statement.

Alistair Burt: The movement restrictions and the serious constraints imposed by the occupation impact the health of the population as well as the further development of quality health services, especially in Gaza. We remain deeply concerned about restrictions on movement and access in Gaza, and the impact that this is having on the humanitarian situation. We have frequent discussions with the Government of Israel and Egypt about the need to ease restrictions on Gaza. We call on the Israeli Government to ease restrictions further and for Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt to work together to ensure a durable solution for Gaza.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-02-20/223980/>

Downing Street

PM call with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel

A Downing Street spokesperson said: The Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel this afternoon.

The leaders discussed the UK's decision to proscribe Hizballah in full.

They also spoke about antisemitism and agreed on the importance of continuing to condemn hatred in all its forms.

The Prime Ministers welcomed the trade continuity agreement signed between the UK and Israel last month and committed to build on our bilateral relationship, including in the areas of trade and technology.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-prime-minister-netanyahu-of-israel-3-march-2019>

Scottish Parliament Motion

S5M-16131 Shona Robison (SNP): UN Independent Inquiry on the 2018 Gaza Protests – That the Parliament acknowledges the findings of the UN independent commission of inquiry on the 2018 Gaza protests, which were published on 28 February 2019; notes that the investigation focused specifically on demonstrations in the Gaza Strip, which were referred to as the Great March of Return; understands that the investigation found that, of the 189 Palestinian deaths, 183 were attributable to Israeli security forces, and that more than 6,100 people were wounded; acknowledges the comments made by Santiago Canton, the chair of the UN commission, that “reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli soldiers committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law”; understands that an inquiry by the UN Human Rights Council found that the Israeli forces killed and maimed Palestinian demonstrators who the council considered did not pose an imminent threat of death or serious injury to others when they were shot, nor were they directly participating in hostilities; recognises that the findings of the UN investigation were based on interviews with more than 300 victims and witnesses and 8,000 pieces of evidence, including drone footage, and encourages the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to share the findings with the International Criminal Court, as called for by the UN investigators.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-16131>

The findings referred to above can be read at

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIOPT/A_HRC_40_74.pdf

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Accountability needed to end excessive use of force against Palestinian protesters in Gaza, says UN expert

The international community must take immediate and decisive action to ensure that Israel cease its violations of international law when responding to the ongoing demonstrations at the Gaza fence, a UN human rights expert said.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, welcomed the findings and recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the deadly 2018 Palestinian protests in Gaza.

The Commission, which was mandated to investigate violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws, presented its [findings](#) on 28 February 2019.

“It found reasonable grounds to believe that, in all but two of the 189 fatalities investigated, the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces against demonstrators was unlawful,” Lynk said. “Accordingly, I support the Commission’s call for accountability with respect to those who used lethal fire unlawfully, and for those who drafted and approved the rules of engagement which permitted this illegal use of lethal fire.”

Among the dead were 35 children, 3 paramedics and 2 journalists. Another 6,106 demonstrators were wounded during the demonstrations.

The Special Rapporteur noted that, since the start of 2019, Israeli security forces have continued to respond to protests along the fence with tear gas, rubber coated bullets and live ammunition. As a result, a further five children have been killed in the past two months. ...

Lynk reiterated that international human rights instruments pertaining to law enforcement provide that firearms may only be used against persons if there is an imminent threat to life or risk of serious injury. He added that, in the context of an occupation, the killings at the Gaza fence resulting from the unlawful use of force might well constitute willful killings of the protected population, which constitute a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and potentially a war crime under the Rome Statute.

“We must ensure legal accountability and end impunity for the excessive use of force against largely peaceful Palestinian demonstrators, and the resulting arbitrary deprivation of life,” said the Special Rapporteur. “This is a grave violation of their right to life and it abrogates their guaranteed freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association.”

Lynk also endorsed the recommendations of the Commission that the de facto authorities in Gaza failed in their duties to prevent the indiscriminate use of incendiary kites and balloons, which caused economic damage and civilian fear in southern Israel. ...

As the one-year anniversary of the “Great March of Return” on 30 March 2019 draws closer, and in view of the ever-deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern over possible rising levels of violence if no firm action was taken to pursue accountability and justice. “Continuing to suffocate Gaza is a blot on the world’s conscience and a recipe for more bloodshed,” Lynk said. “Restoring Gaza and ensuring justice and accountability would give the region hope that a better Middle East is possible.” ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24255&LangID=E>

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Other Relevant Information

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN expert urges States to protect “mutually reinforcing” freedoms of expression, and religion or belief

States must step up measures to protect freedom of religion or belief, a UN human rights expert said today, citing concerns about the increasing use of anti-blasphemy laws and the imposition of draconian criminal penalties for expressing an opinion about religion.

“The increasing application of limits on freedom of expression, including new legal and extra-legal limitations by State and non-State actors, is having a concerning impact on freedom of religion or belief, globally,” Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, told the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

“Freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing rights when exercised within the legal framework established by

international human rights law. Consequently, where we observe abuses of one right, we are likely to see the stage being set for abuses of the other,” he said.

In his report to the Council, Shaheed presented examples of restrictions on freedom of expression, including public order measures, anti-blasphemy, anti-proselytising and anti-apostasy laws, as well as policies to combat religious hatred and extremism. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24257&LangID=E>

Freedom of religion or belief: Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session40/Documents/A_HRC_40_58.docx

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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>

House of Commons Library Briefing

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8409/CBP-8409.pdf>

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 in 10 days**

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