

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

UNRWA

Marsha De Cordova (Labour) [228144] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what the long-term strategy of the Government is with respect to sustainable support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Alistair Burt: The UK has a multi-year commitment to support United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and we plan to continue to fund the Agency in line with that agreement. This will provide basic services such as health and education to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank and the region.

Last year the UK led international efforts to help ensure UNRWA's essential services were maintained, by almost doubling our original core support of £33.5 million to £65.5 million in total, and lobbying other donors to step up, to ensure the funding burden is shared more evenly across the international community. Both the UK and UNRWA recognise the need for UNRWA to reform to ensure its sustainability, and UNRWA has undertaken significant cost-cutting measures to respond to budget cuts and growing needs. We welcome UNRWA's efforts to broaden its donor base and are encouraging partners to provide more funding and more predictable disbursements. A long-term solution requires a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for Palestinian refugees. Until that happens the UK remains firmly committed to supporting UNRWA and Palestinian refugees.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-03-04/228144/>

Palestinians: Schools

Joan Ryan (Independent) [228536] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 21 January 2019 to Question 209284 on Palestinians: Schools, whether her Department has commissioned the study into the new Palestinian textbooks.

Alistair Burt: The UK government is deeply concerned about the findings of the IMPACT-se report into the Palestinian Authority's (PA) new curriculum and it remains a priority for the Department for International Development (DFID) to

commission an independent review of the PA's textbooks. Our timeline for the textbook review remains unchanged. We expect to be able to announce our partners in the review and the start of work on this project shortly. We cannot yet provide further information owing to ongoing commercial discussions, but we will inform interested parliamentarians as soon as possible. In the interim, we are continuing to raise our concerns about incitement in education, which I did personally at a meeting with the Palestinian Education Minister in January 2019.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-03-05/228536/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-01-16/209284/>

The report referred to above can be read at

http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/The-New-PA-2018-Curriculum_Grades-1-12.pdf

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Joan Ryan (Independent) [228548] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether the salaries of Palestinian Authority (PA) employees paid by her Department will be reduced as a result of the the announcement by the PA Minister of Finance that the salaries of public employees will be partial following the ending of US support to the PA.

Alistair Burt: The UK is concerned about the effects of US and Israeli cuts to the PA's budget on both the PA's ability to deliver essential services to Palestinians and on the prospects for peace and stability in the region. The Palestinian Ministry of Finance and Planning has not published details of the planned reductions in wages announced last month. DFID officials will engage with the PA to assess the implications for PEGASE beneficiaries. The UK continues to support a stable PA which can act as an effective partner for peace with Israel through financial assistance to the health and education sectors to exclusively support the salaries of vetted public servants in the West Bank.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-03-05/228548/>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Occupied Palestinian Territories

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated): To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the Government of Israel about the increase in settlement building in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Baroness Goldie: My Lords, we regularly raise concerns with the Israeli authorities, urging them to reverse their settlement expansion policy. Our ambassador to Israel raised concerns with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 29 January. The Minister for the Middle East issued a statement on 27 December 2018, expressing disappointment at plans to advance over 2,800 new settlement units in the West Bank.

Baroness Tonge: ... there are now nearly 800,000 settlers in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, and they are there illegally under international law. Why do we allow trade with the settlements in that case? Surely it is illegal to trade with them, too. Given the scale of the occupation of the West Bank and east Jerusalem, when will the Government put pressure on Israel—wait for it—to consider one truly democratic state, with equal rights for all its citizens and the right of return for refugees?

Baroness Goldie: My Lords, in response to the latter part of her question, the noble Baroness will be aware of the United Kingdom's long-standing position, which is that we support a two-state settlement and we want to see that happen. We believe that a political settlement is the only way to bring progress for the two communities. On the issue of trade, she raises an important point. Trade is important, not just for the United Kingdom and Israel, but also for the United Kingdom and the Palestinian Authority. She is aware that our total trade in goods and services with the PA, for 2017, was £70 million. We entered into a new trade agreement with Israel just last month, and a separate one with the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli trade agreement excludes goods created in Israeli settlements in the OPTs.

Lord Garel-Jones (Conservative): My Lords, given the poor state of relations between the independent Palestinian territories and the State of Israel, what, if anything, are Her Majesty's Government doing to help promote better relations between those two parties and thus advance the prospect of a two-state solution?

Baroness Goldie: The United Kingdom endeavours to support the Middle East peace plan and we do that with funding through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. For 2019-20, that programme will be worth £10 million. We also offer help through DfID to the Occupied Palestinian Territories under three main headings: supporting Palestinian refugees across the Middle East; supporting the Palestinian Authority to deliver basic services, build stability and promote reform; and giving help to the Palestinian market development programme to strengthen the private sector in the OPTs.

Lord Grocott (Labour): My Lords, given the unremitting expansion of settlement activity despite international opposition, for how much longer do the Government consider that a two-state solution will remain a viable option?

Baroness Goldie: We continue to believe that it is a viable option and, as I indicated to my noble friend Lord Garel-Jones, the Government support that assessment with active financial help. That is a very important contribution to the Middle East peace process. Of course, our position on the settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law, they present an obstacle to peace and threaten the physical viability of a two-state solution. The noble Lord is quite correct to raise that concern. The United Kingdom believes that both communities will benefit from peace and we hope that the prospect of peace will facilitate a change in approach to a more optimistic outcome.

The Lord Bishop of Southwark: My Lords, I attend annually the Vatican-mandated Holy Land Coordination, as well as attending other things in the Holy Land. I shall be there in a week's time with my curates. In the visit of the co-ordination group in 2017, we noted the injustice of the separation barrier built across Palestinian land in the Cremisan Valley and the creeping annexation of territory through settlement building. Will the Minister accept the denial of hope to the young people of Palestine that this taking of their land represents and reconsider the Government's stand on delaying recognition of the state of Palestine in support of the two-state solution?

Baroness Goldie: I thank the right reverend Prelate for making a very important point. The situation he outlines is profoundly undesirable. That is why, as I have indicated, the United Kingdom is doing what it can to support both communities—the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel—in trying to take forward a solution to what has been a challenging and anxious problem. On the question of recognition, we will recognise a Palestinian state at a time when it best serves the objectives of peace. Bilateral recognition in itself cannot, sadly, either end the occupation or achieve peace, but we believe that the work we are carrying out at the moment is an important contributor to helping both entities look to a future where peace might just be possible.

Baroness Northover (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, accountability and hope are clearly

vital, as the right reverend Prelate has pointed out. The UN commission of inquiry into the deaths of 189 Palestinians in Gaza last year has just concluded that it has, “reasonable grounds to believe that ... Israeli soldiers committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Some of those violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity”. What is the Government’s response to those conclusions?

Baroness Goldie: These are very grave conclusions and the United Kingdom will be determining its response to the report in conjunction with our global partners, not least in the UN.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (Crossbench): My Lords, was this issue of trade emanating from the settlements—the illegal settlements—raised in the negotiations undertaken to roll over the EU-Israel agreement to include the UK in the circumstances of Brexit? If the subject was not raised and if it was not made clear that we should not give preferential treatment to these, why not?

Baroness Goldie: I can tell the noble Lord that the agreements to which I referred are intended to take effect when EU trade agreements no longer apply to the UK. That will of course be on implementation of Brexit, either at the end of the implementation period or if the UK leaves without a deal. On the further matters he raised, I have made it clear that the trade agreement with Israel does not include products from the settlement areas of the OPTs: those products are excluded. The agreement was laid before Parliament on 26 February, and there will be an opportunity for Parliament to scrutinise it.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-03-11/debates/58A87E83-F6DB-4394-A157-82DD5C856EC2/OccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-middle-east-statement-on-israeli-settlement-announcement>

The trade agreements referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781440/CS_Israel_1.2019_Trade.pdf

and

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781389/MS_14.2019_IPTP_PLO.pdf

The Commission of Inquiry report referred to above can be read at

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

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL14070] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the dangers to Palestinian children in territory occupied by Israel following the research by Defence for Children International–Palestine published on 31 December 2018 which said that in 2018 56 Palestinian children had been killed as a result of Israeli military action.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK has repeatedly made clear to Israel our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the Israel Defense Forces police protests and the Gaza perimeter, including use of live ammunition. It is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties. Children must be protected in line with international law and not put in harm's way.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-26/HL14070/>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.dci->

[palestine.org/year_in_review_2018_reigned_deadly_force_on_palestinian_children](https://www.dci-palestine.org/year_in_review_2018_reigned_deadly_force_on_palestinian_children)

Israel: Gaza

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL14071] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the damage to agriculture from incursions by Israeli military personnel driving bulldozers which have razed and levelled land in Gaza.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Whilst we have not made any assessment on this issue, we have made clear to the Israeli authorities our concerns about the humanitarian and environmental impact of the damage and destruction of Palestinian agricultural land. We condemn the destruction of Palestinian property and have called on the Israeli authorities to cease such activity.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-26/HL14071/>

Israel: Palestinians

Lord Judd (Labour) [HL14102] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they provide support to Palestinians brought before Israeli military courts in the West Bank to ensure that they have access to legal representation; and if so, whether they seek reimbursement for any such support from the government of Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We are concerned by aspects of the Israeli military justice and detention system. We continue to fund projects providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers. The British legal charity "Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights" has implemented a 'Know Your Rights' campaign in partnership with Defence for Children International-Palestine which works on projects, focused on protecting and promoting Palestinian human rights in the occupied West Bank if detained in Israel's military detention system. We remain committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to the practices surrounding Palestinians, including children, in detention in Israel.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-02-27/HL14102/>

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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 in 3 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