

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Home Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Sikhs: Contribution to the UK

col 55WH Seema Malhotra (Labour Co-op): ... The Sikh community is an established community in the UK, whose members first arrived in significant numbers in the 1950s. We know that Sikhs are now well established with a significant and leading presence in almost all professions. ... There are almost 500,000 Sikhs across the UK—approaching 1% of the total population.

Sikhs have an 84% employment rate, with top sectors of employment including public service, charity work, healthcare, teaching, accountancy and finance, and IT and technology. ...

col 56WH Despite the background of Sikhs' contribution to the UK, it is extraordinary that our shared history is little known or understood. Understanding different communities is vital for not just community cohesion, but getting policy right, including the rights of Sikhs to wear their articles of faith—an important right that led to exemptions for the kirpan in new knife crime legislation in the recent Offensive Weapons Bill debate.

Sikhs, like other communities, have faced an increase in hate crime attacks. Last year we saw an attack on a turban-wearing Sikh visitor outside the House of Commons.

col 58WH [Gurdwaras] extend charity and welcome and they support those in need. Every week, they welcome people who may be homeless or hungry. They welcome all, irrespective of background, through their doors. They run weekend classes and Punjabi classes, and host our surgeries as Members of Parliament so that we can reach all those in our communities. They have run immigration workshops—a huge issue in many ethnic minority communities—where immigration advisers are supported in providing confidential support and advice to those who desperately need it. ...

col 59WH We live in a peaceful and respectful society because we choose to make it so. The structures that we build between us as a society help to nurture those vital links that make us a safe place for all communities and a place in which we can be sure that future generations will also be safe and will understand and respect one another. The respect that we hold and the understanding that we nurture are part of a statement about how we as a nation recognise that we have more in common than that which divides us.

John Spellar (Labour): ... my hon. Friend ... has come to a key point about the Sikh community in the United Kingdom. While enormously proud of its history, culture and tradition, it is also enormously proud to be British. Something like three quarters of the Sikh community in this country were born in the UK and are hugely proud of this country. Being proud to be Sikh and proud to be British identifies the Sikhs and is why the Sikh community makes such a great contribution to our country. ...

Pat McFadden (Labour): ... Many Sikhs came to my constituency and others in the west midlands in the 1950s and 1960s, often to do hard, even back-breaking, work in steel mills and foundries. They often faced barriers of prejudice as they laid down the foundations for their new life. Although we quite rightly associate the Sikh community with social mobility, that mobility rests on the hard work of the first generation of Sikhs who came here. As is the case with so many immigrants, they worked hard to make sure that their children had better chances than them in life.

col 62WH ... there is the story of Tarsem Singh Sandhu, who led the fight in Wolverhampton for Sikhs to be able to wear a turban while driving a bus. ... Tarsem Singh Sandhu was told that he would lose his job unless he was clean shaven and abandoned his turban, but he took a stand ... He had to face down great hostility to win his battle, and his bravery and that of those who campaigned alongside him paved the way for change that today we take for granted. Even after that great progress, however, there are still struggles. Legislation still has to be amended to ensure that the simple act of observing the five Ks and wearing a turban can be done freely. ...

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Labour): ... Despite being only about 1% of the UK population, British Sikhs have without doubt made an immense contribution to our nation. They have among the highest numbers of graduates of any community, and huge proportions of them are in employment and in the voluntary and charitable sector. According to official statistics, they also have the highest level of home ownership ...

col 65WH **Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... According to UK Home Office data, 117 incidents of hate crimes against Sikhs were recorded in 2017-18. That figure is likely to be underestimated, as many victims of hate crime do not report them. Incidents of discrimination towards Sikhs have been recorded for years. For example, the British Sikh Report 2013 estimated that three quarters of the UK's Sikhs had experienced racism. According to the UK Sikh Survey 2016, almost one in five Sikhs had encountered discrimination in a public place over the past year, with one in seven having directly experienced workplace discrimination. The report found that Sikhs who wear religious iconography or clothing are the most likely to experience abuse. Since 9/11, both individual Sikhs and gurdwaras have regularly been on the receiving end of attacks by people who have mistaken them for Muslims and mosques respectively.

It is simply unacceptable that anyone should be subject to discrimination, abuse or violence because of their religious beliefs, or lack thereof. We should do everything in our power to tackle discrimination against Sikhs in Britain. ...

col 66WH **Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op):** ... Despite making up 0.8% of the population, according to the 2011 census, Sikhs accounted for 2% of religious hate crimes recorded by the police in 2017-18. I want us to tackle hate crime and prejudice by taking today as a starting point for educating the whole population about the influence that Sikhs have had and how their impact has shaped the Britain of today, as well as many other parts of the world. ...

The hate crime action plan refresh in 2018 was extremely disappointing, given the promises made to Sikh organisations that they would not be ignored or invisible to Government; but what matters now is how the Government address Sikh hate crime.

col 67WH Our children need to learn about the contribution of the Sikh community, and to do that, we must teach people about the honest history of Britain. We must learn about the positive and progressive parts as well as the repression and exploitation that has occurred

in Britain's name. We need to learn that, during the second world war, British soldiers were paid differently depending on their race. ...

Our children must learn about the Amritsar massacre, where British troops massacred unarmed demonstrators. They must learn about the life of Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, daughter of the last Maharaja of the Sikh empire and goddaughter of Queen Victoria, who pioneered the cause of women's rights in Britain and abroad. They must learn about the grassroots activism of many Sikhs in the 1960s to challenge unfair pay, working conditions and cultural oppression. ...

If we genuinely want to recognise the contribution of Sikhs to the UK and the way it has shaped British society, the way it has moulded what it means to be British and the way it has shaped current and future generations, it is not enough simply to discuss it; we must end the discrimination that Sikhs face because of a lack of data. The race disparity audit used 100 datasets across Government to look at how people of all ethnic groups are treated across public services, but there was no data on Sikhs. ...

col 69WH Afzal Khan (Labour): ... a report by the all-party group on British Muslims described the very direct and tangible impact that Islamophobia has on our Sikh communities. Whether that is gurdwaras being defaced, or Sikh men such as Dr Sarandeve Bhabra being targeted by Islamophobes because of the mistaken perception that they are Muslims, we are acutely aware that more must be done by all in society to tackle the impact of rising Islamophobia that affects all our communities. ...

col 71WH Alison Thewliss (SNP): ... there has been anti-minority hostility and hate crime about, which the Scottish Sikh community has taken on through a vibrant proactive approach to promoting diversity in Scotland. Each year, the Network of Sikh Organisations educates over 4,000 Scottish school pupils, and interacts and engages with over 40,000 non-Sikh visitors to gurdwaras. ...

col 72WH All the Sikh gurdwaras in Scotland provide a range of educational facilities, including Punjabi heritage classes, tuition classes, computing classes and health and wellbeing classes. Those are all free, and seek to increase and improve the life chances of people from minority ethnic communities. Combined, the gurdwaras educate over 4,000 young Scottish Sikhs through their educational services. ...

col 76WH The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Jake Berry): ... I am delighted that our Parliament has been made richer and more diverse. Having the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) speak today was one of the highlights, as he is the first turban-wearing Sikh in Parliament. We should celebrate his historic role in the story of our Parliament and our nation.

In addition, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) is the first female Sikh, which we should also celebrate. ...

col 77WH It is important that I put on record how the Government, particularly through my right hon. Friend Lord Bourne, the Minister for Faith, engages with the Sikh community and particularly Sikh umbrella groups. ...

It is right that the Government support places of worship, so that religious people can meet, come together, pray together and practise their faith. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-04-30/debates/1D8A9453-C2DA-4757-9248-6F5BC3130BDF/SikhsContributionToTheUK>

The Hate Crime Action Plan Refresh, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748175/Hate_crime_refresh_2018_FINAL_WEB.PDF

The Race Disparity Audit, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

The All Party Group on British Muslims report referred to above can be read at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf>

British Sikh Report 2019

<http://www.britishsikhreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/British-Sikh-Report-2019-Online.pdf>

House of Lords Debate

Online Harms White Paper

col 898 **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Ashton of Hyde):** ... This White Paper is an important document and a world first. For many people nowadays, the internet is an integral part of daily life. However, illegal and unacceptable content and activity remain far too prevalent online. There is currently a range of voluntary initiatives that try to address some of these problems, but while there has been some progress, the efficacy and pace of these actions have varied widely across different companies. These inconsistencies still leave too many users unsafe online, and the current regulatory landscape lacks the scope and coherence to tackle this complex set of problems. ...

col 899 To tackle these harms, we intend to establish in law a new duty of care on companies towards their users, overseen by an independent regulator. This regulator will set clear safety standards, backed up by mandatory reporting requirements and effective enforcement powers. Companies will be held to account for tackling a comprehensive set of online harms ranging from illegal activity and content to behaviours that might not be illegal but are none the less highly damaging to individuals and society. ...

We recognise that a very wide range of businesses, such as retailers, consumer brands and service providers of all kinds, currently enable some degree of user interaction or user-generated content online. Although we will minimise excessive burdens according to the size and resources of organisations, all companies will be required to take reasonable and proportionate action to tackle harms on their services. ...

... there has been comment in some newspapers that the measures we have set out in the White Paper will fetter the freedom of the press. I reassure noble Lords that that is not the case. ... Journalistic or editorial content will not be affected by the regulatory framework that we are putting in place. Furthermore, the regulator will have a legal duty to pay due regard to protecting users' rights online—in particular, their privacy and freedom of expression. The regulator will not be responsible for policing truth and accuracy online. ...

col 900 There is a question of whether newspapers' comment sections will fall within the scope of the online regulator. We are consulting on proposals for the statutory duty of care to apply to companies that allow users to share or discover user-generated content or interact with each other online. However, as the Secretary of State made clear in the other place, where these services are already well regulated, as is the case with IPSO and Impress regarding their members' moderated comment sections, we will not duplicate those efforts. ...

col 905 **Lord Anderson of Ipswich (Crossbench):** ... John Perry Barlow, the libertarian and Grateful Dead lyricist who died last year, wrote in 1996 that the internet was, "creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity".

To national Governments, those, "weary giants of flesh and steel", he directed a famous warning in his *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*: "You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather". ...

col 906 But as this White Paper repeatedly demonstrates, the scale and intensity with which communication is now possible have brought in their wake the potential for new and

serious harms, harms for which counter-speech and alternative narratives are a necessary but insufficient answer. Even the imperative of free speech, central though it is, cuts both ways. Bullies, stalkers and foul-mouthed abusers inhibit the online freedoms of others, in much the same way as anti-social behaviour in the real world drives the most vulnerable from the public square. The risk that free speech will be chilled by overregulation is real and acute. However, underregulation too can inhibit freedom of speech, in particular, the freedom of the women and minority groups who, in Parliament—and, I suspect, elsewhere—attract a disproportionate amount of online abuse. ...

col 911 Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Conservative): ... There is an inherent risk in what is being proposed here, that it could lead to legalistic and obstructive action, with proscription replacing persuasion or agreement, sometimes with positive outcomes. ... We are not the worst country. We are not a country where these abuses are particularly noted. We have the fastest removal rates for offensive material in the world. ...

col 927 Viscount Colville of Culross (Crossbench): ... Paragraph 4.2 [of the White Paper] looks at types of online activity, including “hosting”, “sharing” and “discovery of user-generated content”. My concern is that this definition is so widely drawn that it will cover much user-generated content on the websites of broadcasters and newspapers. As the Minister pointed out, these are already regulated by Ofcom, IMPRESS or IPSO. ... I am also concerned by some of the definitions of online harms set out in table one in paragraph 2.2 ... particularly those under the column entitled “harms with a less clear definition”. I am worried that unless their definition is carefully focused, they will have a chilling effect on free speech by leaving media companies vulnerable to allegations of breaching their duty of care. ...

Another term that worries me is “violent content”, which also comes under the column entitled “less clear definition”. This definition must also be drawn very carefully so that it does not censor reports on demonstrations or terrorism. ...

col 940 Lord Ashton of Hyde: ... Generally speaking, we know that the list of harms in the White Paper will not incorporate every harm that every person is interested in, or that exist on the internet. We want in the duty of care to tell internet and tech companies that they can no longer say, “This is not my problem”. They will have to look at the harms and will have an active duty to educate themselves about the potential harms that their website or app, for example, produces. Even if these are not delineated, it will not be an excuse for a company to say that they are not on the list. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2019-04-30/debates/A8EE53D6-D377-4C74-8802-3BB2480405DE/OnlineHarmsWhitePaper>

The White Paper referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/793360/Online_Harms_White_Paper.pdf

House of Commons Written Answer

Slaughterhouses: Animal Welfare

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [247644] To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the welfare standards of animals that are not stunned before slaughter in the UK; 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.

EC Regulation 1099/2009 sets down the welfare standards for animals at the time of killing, including regulations specifically concerned with animals which are slaughtered without stunning. In addition to these EU-level requirements, the Government has adopted stricter national regulations for animals that are slaughtered without stunning, which provide them with more extensive protections than the EU Regulation. These are set down in The Welfare of Animals at Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-25/247644/>

Scottish Parliament Time for Reflection

Rabbi Eli Grunewald (Jewish Student Chaplain Scotland): ... Time is the most precious commodity that we have, yet we sometimes treat it as though it is unlimited. As a chaplain, it is not strange for me to hear a student express feelings such as a desire to wish away today, this week, even this month, when things are not going so well. While sympathising with the stress and complications that often go hand in hand with student life, I always encourage students to resist that desire. Every day is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, one that we will never have again. Robert Burns summed that up wonderfully, in 1790, in his poem “Tam o’ Shanter”. As Burns put it, “Nae man can tether time or tide.”

Although I believe that the poem refers to the story of a farmer and his wayward friends, that line encapsulates the certainty that time will run out eventually and will not wait for anyone or anything.

Last week, we celebrated Passover, the great festival of liberation. In the middle of the celebrations, we pause to do something very simple: count the days. From then, each day until the early-summer festival of Pentecost, we mention how many days have passed. Today is day 10. Our counting helps us realise the importance of every day, every week, every month. It helps us focus on the here and now, and reminds us to use our time well. It is so easy to forget that the moments in which we live become days, months, years. An ancient Jewish source—the Book of Psalms—mentions that idea of counting days. The psalmist dwells on the reality that our lives are brief and filled with challenging times, and pass us by so very quickly. He then asks God to help us to count our days wisely. Rabbi Dr Harvey Belovski explains that the psalmist means that, when we remember that the clock is ticking for all of us, we will be more likely to use our days to the full. And I believe that, when we reflect on how limited time is—when we remember how limited our own time is—that will help us use our time wisely and, indeed, give us more time for reflection.

To read the full text see

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12066&i=109151&c=2170716#ScotParlOR>

Scottish Government

Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report 2019

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/publication/2019/04/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2019/documents/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2019/equality-outcomes-mainstreaming-report-2019/govscot%3Adocument>

TOP

Israel

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Andy Slaughter (Labour) (2344) Illegal Annexation of Occupied Palestinian and Syrian Territories – That this House condemns any annexation by the State of Israel of any part of the territories occupied in 1967; notes it has already illegally annexed East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights; further notes that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu threatened during Israeli elections to annex part of or all of the West Bank; recalls that international law prohibits the acquisition of territory by force; believes that any such move threatens any solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict; and calls on the Government to make clear that any such Israeli annexation would entail significant consequences for UK-Israeli relations.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/52872/illegal-annexation-of-occupied-palestinian-and-syrian-territories>

United Nations

Speakers Argue Over Special Information Programme Addressing Question of Palestine, as Information Committee Session Continues

... **Andrea Stanford (United States)** [said that] Initiatives such as the Department's Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine promote one-sided representations of Israel, give ammunition to that country's enemies and harm the Organization's credibility. She called on the Department to address that concern and ensure that anti-Israel messages are not part of its activities.

Mr. Naveh (Israel) said that his country's Holocaust Remembrance Day on 1 May not only remembers the 6 million Jewish people murdered by the Nazis, but also marks a warning of what can happen when the idea of racial or national supremacy is supported. As well, the Day illuminates how the world order must be based on mutual respect and the recognition of nations' rights to exist in peace, determine their own destiny and defend themselves, which is why the international community should continue commemorating the Holocaust internationally here at the United Nations. ...

He went on to say that the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine has presented a dishonest narrative of the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a biased account of the current situation in the region. The public exhibition *Question of Palestine*, displayed in the General Assembly building, fails to address the conflict's root cause — the ongoing refusal of the Palestinian leadership to recognize the Jewish people's right to self-determination, as recognized in General Assembly resolution 181, adopted in 1947. The Palestinians have not, to this day, accepted the resolution because they do not want to allow the Jewish people to seek self-determination, he said, and he called for a different information programme on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that reflects the truth. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/pi2257.doc.htm>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Diplomatic Service: Training

Paul Farrelly (Labour) [245675] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what plans his Department has to ensure that diplomats receive training on local faith communities in advance of postings.

Mark Field: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provides a wide range of resources to ensure that staff understand the influence of faith on foreign policy. For the past few years, we have offered two-day courses on religious literacy, in partnership with the London School of Economics. Other courses are held throughout the year, often tailored to geographical departments, for example the Political Islam, and Ethnic and Religious minorities in the Middle East and North Africa courses. In countries where religion has an impact on the work of a diplomat, this is covered in both pre-posting briefings and during the first few weeks following arrival at post. More generally, religion and diplomacy forms part of the 'Key Themes in International Politics' module of the Diplomatic Academy, which is compulsory for new fast stream entrants into the FCO.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-04-18/245675/>

TOP

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>

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>

TOP

Consultations ** new or updated today

Online Harms White Paper (closing date 1 July 2019)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>

Opt-out organ donation: organs and tissues excluded from the new system (closing date 22 July 2019)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/opt-out-organ-donation-organs-and-tissues-excluded-from-the-new-system>

TOP

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