

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Visas: Ministers of Religion

Patrick Grady (SNP) [251347] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will publish a response to Early Day Motion (a) 2358 on Changes to visa requirements for religious workers and (b) 2362 on Tier 5 visas for ministers of religion.

Caroline Nokes: The Government very much values the importance of religious and cultural expression to our communities in the UK and we continue to welcome Ministers of Religion from all faiths who wish to come to the UK in accordance with our Immigration Rules.

There are two routes for Religious Workers in the current immigration system.

Tier 2 Ministers of Religion is for those playing a leading role as faith leaders in our religious institutions. This category requires those coming to have a strong command of the English language in order to ensure Ministers of Religion can lead their congregations effectively and can interact with the wider communities they serve.

The second route, Tier 5 Religious Workers, is for those undertaking non-pastoral roles supporting the activities of these institutions. In line with our other temporary work categories, Tier 5 Religious Workers are not required to demonstrate their English language skills when applying for a visa.

We have taken steps to prevent our temporary work categories being used as a means to live in the UK for longer periods. Tier 5 is designed to facilitate short periods of knowledge sharing and cultural exchange and yet we have identified evidence of migrants using our Tier 5 Religious Worker and Charity Worker routes to facilitate near continuous residence in the UK.

We made changes to the Immigration Rules in October 2018 to preclude the use of Tier 5 by minister of Religion and to introduce a 'cooling off period', preventing Tier 5 Religious worker and Tier 5 Charity Worker visa holders from returning to the UK, via these immigration routes, for 12 months after their visa expires. This approach underpins the Government's intention that these are temporary routes.

Bona fide Ministers of Religion are still welcome to come to the UK and that there

remains a route for them in the immigration system through Tier 2.

The Government wrote to faith leaders in December, setting out the detail and explaining the rationale for the changes. Officials remain in regular contact with stakeholders and we are embarking on an extensive programme of engagement, in connection with the future immigration system.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-05-07/251347/>

The Early Day Motions referred to above can be read at

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/52887/changes-to-visa-requirements-for-religious-workers>

and

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/52889/tier-5-visas-for-ministers-of-religion>

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Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: West Bank

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15421] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the government of Israel about the closure of checkpoints and crossings between Israel and the West Bank during Jewish religious holidays.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not raised the specific issue of the closure of crossings during Jewish religious holidays with the Israeli authorities. We recognise the Israeli authorities' legitimate need to deploy security measures in some circumstances, including the closure of checkpoints and crossings, and we encourage them to do so in a way which minimises tensions.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-04-29/HL15421/>

Palestinians: Religious Freedom

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15441] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about Palestinian Christians in Gaza being denied permits to travel to worship in Bethlehem or Jerusalem; and what action they will take to preserve religious freedom in the Palestinian Occupied Territory.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK remains committed to freedom of movement for those wishing to pursue religious ceremonies and purposes. We understand that in April Israel provided some permits for Christians to visit holy sites both in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and outside of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. However Israel continues to implement severe restrictions on movement access for Palestinians in Gaza. We regularly raise our concerns about Gaza with the Israeli authorities, urging them to ease movement and access restrictions and work together with the Palestinian Authority and Egypt to see long-term improvements to the situation in Gaza. We encourage Israel to continue to promptly issue permits regularly to both Christians and Muslims in Gaza, and uphold freedom of religion and belief for all.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-04-30/HL15441/>

Jerusalem: Demolition

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15442] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that Israel's Supreme Court is allowing the demolition of 60 buildings housing 500 Palestinian families in Silwan, East Jerusalem.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: On 26 April the EU issued a statement, on behalf of the UK and other EU Member States, requesting that Israel reconsider the pending demolition orders in Silwan. 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. 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/2019-04-30/HL15442/>

The statement referred to above can be read at

[https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/61531/local-eu-statement-demolition-palestinian-property-east-jerusalem-
neighbourhood_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/61531/local-eu-statement-demolition-palestinian-property-east-jerusalem-neighbourhood_en)

Israel: Elections

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15443] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that political operatives working for the Likud-National Liberal Movement have claimed to have decreased voter turnout among Arab-Israelis by illegally hiding 1,300 cameras inside Arab polling stations during the recent elections in Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We have not made any assessment on this issue as this is a matter for the Israeli authorities. We have discussed with our international partners, including Israel, the importance of free, fair and pluralistic elections in upholding the principle and practice of democracy.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2019-04-30/HL15443/>

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL15444] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they are making to the government of Israel about reports that Israeli forces use live fire in situations where there is no risk to those forces.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is 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 whether use of live fire had been appropriate.

We repeatedly make clear to the Israeli authorities our longstanding concerns about the manner in which the IDF police non-violent 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/2019-04-30/HL15444/>

United Nations

Gaza blockade causes ‘near ten-fold increase’ in food dependency, says UN agency

At a time when Muslims globally are observing the holy month of Ramadan, more than half the population in Gaza depends on the international community for food aid, the director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) [said](#) on Monday, citing a “near ten-fold increase” in need.

According to UNRWA, it must secure an additional \$60 million by June to continue providing food to more than one million Palestine refugees in Gaza, including some 620,000 “abject poor” who cannot cover their basic food needs and are surviving on \$1.6 per day. The funds are also needed to cover the severely challenged 390,000 “absolute poor”, who survive on about \$3.5 per day. ...

From fewer than 80,000 Palestine refugees in Gaza receiving social assistance in 2000, today over one million people need urgent food aid to get through their day.

“This is a near ten-fold increase caused by the blockade that led to the closure of Gaza and its disastrous impact on the local economy, the successive conflicts that razed entire neighborhoods and public infrastructure to the ground, and the ongoing internal Palestinian political crisis that started in 2007 with the arrival of Hamas to power in Gaza,” said Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza.

UNRWA is also confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growing number of registered Palestine refugees.

Moreover, the tragic death of 195 Palestinians – including 14 UNRWA students and the long-lasting physical and psychological injuries of 29,000 people during year-long demonstrations, known as the ‘Great March of Return’ – come after three devastating conflicts since 2009 that, combined, left at least 3,790 dead and more than 17,000 injured. A 2017 UN [report](#) predicted that by 2020, Gaza would be unlivable.

Today, with over 53 per cent of Gazans unemployed and more than one million dependent upon quarterly UNRWA food handouts, UN agencies and remittances from abroad are all that stand between Gaza and total collapse. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/05/1038401>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Civil Servants: Training

Lyn Brown (Labour) [251281] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of increased religious literacy across the Civil Service.

Mark Field: The Government has long held the view that religion plays an important role in the political and social life in many countries throughout the world. The FCO provides a wide range of resources, including through the Diplomatic Academy, to ensure that staff, including those across Whitehall working in our overseas posts, understand the influence that faith can have on foreign policy, and on their specific jobs.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-05-07/251281/>

Religious Freedom

Lyn Brown (Labour) [251282] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the merits of extending the remit of the review of religious persecution led by the Bishop of Truro to (a) the Department for International Development, (b) the Department for International Trade, (c) the Home Office, (d) the Cabinet Office and (e) the National Security Office.

Mark Field: The Review was commissioned by the Foreign Secretary into the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, so it would be inappropriate for it to review, or make recommendations for, other departments. However, other government departments may wish to take note of the Review report and its findings.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-05-07/251282/>

The review referred to above can be read at

<https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/interim-report.pdf>

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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>

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

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>

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