



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Foreign Affairs

Other Relevant Information

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Marriage: Humanism

Rebecca Long Bailey (Labour) [27537] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the judgment in *Smyth, Re Judicial Review* [2017] NIQB 55, for what reasons the remit of the Law Commission's review of weddings law includes the legal recognition of humanist marriages.

Alex Chalk: The Government announced in June 2019 that the Law Commission will conduct a fundamental review of the law on how and where people can legally marry in England and Wales. As part of that review, the Government invited the Law Commission to make recommendations about how marriage by humanist and other non-religious belief organisations could be incorporated into a revised or new scheme for all marriages that is simple, fair and consistent.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-10/27537/>

The judgment referred to above can be read at

<https://www.baillii.org/nie/cases/NIHC/QB/2017/55.html>

Information about the review referred to above can be read at

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/weddings/>

TOP

Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Textbooks

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [27997] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will publish the (a) outcomes and (b) recommendations of the planned EU review of Palestinian textbooks.

James Cleverly: The UK government is deeply concerned about allegations of incitement in Palestinian Authority's school textbooks; and secured an independent EU-funded review of the textbooks which is underway. We expect interim findings to be due by June 2020 and full findings later in the year. We continue to encourage the EU to publish the report.

The International Development Secretary reiterated our concerns in a call to the Palestinian Authority's Education Minister just last month.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-11/27997/>

Palestinians: Textbooks

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [27999] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether she has made an assessment of the implications for her policies of the September 2019 report by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education on the content of school textbooks published by the Palestinian Authority; and if she will make a statement.

James Cleverly: The UK government is deeply concerned about the allegations of incitement in Palestinian Authority's school textbooks in the report published by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education in September 2019.

At the UK's insistence, the EU agreed to fund an independent review of the textbooks which is underway. We expect interim findings to be due in Spring 2020 and full findings later in the year. The International Development Secretary reiterated our concerns in a call to the Palestinian Authority's Education Minister just last month.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-11/27999/>

Palestinians: Textbooks

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [28000] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when it is planned to publish the findings of the review established by her Department, the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research and other international partners of the books included in the Palestinian Authority's school curriculum.

James Cleverly: The UK government is deeply concerned about allegations of incitement in Palestinian Authority's school textbooks. The UK secured EU agreement to commission the Georg Eckert Institute to conduct an independent review of the textbooks, which is underway. We expect interim findings by June 2020 and full findings later in the year.

We continue to encourage the EU to publish the findings. The International Development Secretary reiterated our concerns in a call to the Palestinian Authority's Education Minister just last month.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-11/28000/>

UNRWA: Finance

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [27998] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make representations to UNWRA on ensuring that it allocates resources on the basis of need.

James Cleverly: The UK recognises the United Nations Relief Works and Agency's (UNWRA) unique mandate from the UN General Assembly, to support Palestinian refugees until a lasting political settlement is reached, which determines their final status. The UK is committed to funding UNRWA to meet humanitarian need and

promote regional security. Officials are in regular contact with UNRWA to ensure high quality aid delivery and judge that UNRWA is effective in allocating resources on the basis of need.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-11/27998/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Iran: Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Lord Polak (Conservative) [HL2354] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the government of Iran's support for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group, which fired missiles into Israel in February.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We remain deeply concerned by Iran's support to a number of militant and proscribed groups in the region, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). This support directly undermines prospects for regional security and lasting peace in the region. The UK notes with concern the recent escalation in Gaza, including indiscriminate rocket fire which places civilians at risk. Any attacks targeted against civilians are unlawful and unjustifiable. We call on all sides to maintain calm. We have been clear about the dangers of further escalation. A regional conflict is in no one's interest. We will continue to work with international partners to support stability in the region.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-03-09/HL2354/>

Iran: Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Lord Polak (Conservative) [HL2355] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to ensure that the government of Iran's support for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group does not jeopardise negotiations for a permanent peace between Israel and Hamas.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We remain deeply concerned by Iran's support to a number of militant and proscribed groups in the region, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). This support directly undermines prospects for regional security and lasting peace in the region. Longer term, we encourage relevant parties to put forward sustainable proposals to resolve the threat posed to Israel's security by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other militants in Gaza. Misrule is leading to dreadful consequences for the people of Gaza and also of Israel. The perpetual cycle of violence does not serve anyone's interests, and must end.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-03-09/HL2355/>

Israeli Settlements: Arson

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL2382] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports by Tag Meir that 46 mosques and 12 churches have been subject to arson attacks by settlers in the West Bank and Israel in the last 10 years.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Whilst we have not made a specific assessment of this report, we condemn all forms of violence by settlers including against places of worship.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-03-09/HL2382/>

West Bank: Press Freedom

Lord Turnberg (Non-affiliated) [HL2467] To ask Her Majesty's Government what

assessment they have made of the number of journalists currently held without trial by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: We do not hold this information. The British Government is committed to the promotion of media freedom and the protection of journalists, as an essential element of democracy and an important attribute of human rights. The UK supports calls for greater media freedoms in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. We continue to reiterate the importance of a free and open press, and freedom of expression to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Officials from our Consulate-General in Jerusalem regularly raise the issue of freedom of expression, including the revision of relevant legislation, with the Palestinian Authority. We welcome Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh's comments committing to freedom of press and expression, and policies and legislation that will protect journalists. We continue to urge the PA to respect human rights, ensure complaints of mistreatment or arbitrary detention are properly investigated and to continue to improve the performance of the security sector.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-03-10/HL2467/>

United Nations

Secretary-General Appoints Philippe Lazzarini of Switzerland Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugee in Near East ... Mr. Lazzarini brings to the position more than 30 years of experience in humanitarian assistance and international coordination in conflict and post-conflict areas in the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the private sector. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sqa1951.doc.htm>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

COVID-19: Israel has 'legal duty' to ensure that Palestinians in OPT receive essential health services – UN expert

A UN human rights expert has urged Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to live up to their international legal responsibilities by ensuring that the right to health is fully provided to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The legal duty, anchored in Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, requires that Israel, the occupying power, must ensure that all the necessary preventive means available to it are utilized to 'combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics,'" said Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967. ...

The Special Rapporteur observed with concern that the initial publications to increase awareness about the spread of COVID-19 issued by the Israeli Ministry of Health were almost exclusively in Hebrew, with virtually no information posted in Arabic. This serious imbalance is apparently being addressed after protests, but it highlights the importance of ensuring equality of treatment. ...

The Special Rapporteur has previously noted that Israel is in "profound breach" of its international obligations with regards the right to health of Palestinians living under occupation. Significant movement restrictions on patients and health workers already compromise Palestinians' access to healthcare services. In the context of COVID-19, where patients' conditions deteriorate rapidly as symptoms become more severe, any

delays getting to hospital can be fatal.

“I am particularly worried about the potential impact of COVID-19 on Gaza. Its health care system was collapsing even before the pandemic. Its stocks of essential drugs are chronically low. Its natural sources of drinkable water are largely contaminated. Its electrical system provides sporadic power. Deep poverty amid appalling socio-economic conditions is prevalent throughout the Strip,” Lynk said. ...

Finally, respective authorities must speedily address any evidence of racism, xenophobia and bigotry during this pandemic, the expert said.

“Whether it occurs in the differential treatment by authorities during health care delivery, through the imposition of restrictions, through attacks in social media and other forums towards individuals accused of being infected, or through other means, discrimination and racism must be combated by reliable public information and by strong statements opposing it.”

The Special Rapporteur noted that Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas have taken wide-ranging protective measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. This has included significant restrictions on movement and travel, cancellation of public gatherings, creation of quarantine areas, and closure of educational and religious institutions.

“These steps can be supported if they interfere as little as possible with human rights during this emergency,” the UN expert concluded.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25728&LangID=E>

TOP

Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Religious Freedom

Baroness Whitaker (Labour) [HL2530] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the consistency with which the term “freedom of religion or belief” is used in their publications instead of “religious freedom”; and what steps they will take to ensure that only the term “freedom of religion or belief” is used.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The United Kingdom is committed to defending freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief as set out in international law. We attach great importance to referring to 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' in publications, as we assess this best captures the freedom to have a faith, belief, or no belief at all. On occasion, the British Government has referred to 'religious freedom' as a short-hand, but we strive to ensure that 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' is referred as often as practicable, particularly in formal publications.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-03-11/HL2530/>

TOP

Other Relevant Information

Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

Report on Switzerland

<https://rm.coe.int/ecri-report-on-switzerland-sixth-monitoring-cycle-/16809ce4bd>

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/assisteddying.html>

Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/divorcedissolutionandseparation.html>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/educationassemblies.html>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/genocidedeterminationbill.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2019-20/marriageandcivilpartnershipminimumage.html>

Scottish Parliament

Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/112997.aspx>

Consultations ** new or updated today

**** closes in 8 days**

Harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education (closing date 27 March 2020)

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/76f6bdd3-bb14-4956-b089-cd1598323d55/consultation-on-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct-in-higher-education.pdf>

Hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland: an independent review (closing date 31 March 2020)

<https://www.hatecrimereviewni.org.uk/sites/hcr/files/media-files/Consultation%20Paper%20Feb%202020.pdf>

Electing a more diverse Assembly (closing date 22 April 2020)

<http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?ID=389>

Amendments to the organ donation regulations (Wales) (closing date 30 April 2020)
<https://gov.wales/amendments-organ-donation-regulations>

Regulating Independent Educational Institutions (closing date 8 May 2020)
<https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/regulating-independent-education-institutions/>

Protecting places of worship (closing date 10 May 2020)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protecting-places-of-worship-consultation>

TOP

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