



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

Religious Buildings: Security

Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op) [12907] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many places of worship have received funding from her Department for additional safety and security measures by religious denomination in Wales in the last 12 months; and how much each such place of worship has received.

Victoria Atkins: The Places of Worship Protective Security Fund (POW) is a key commitment in the Hate Crime Action Plan published in 2016. The Scheme provides funding to places of worship that have been victims of or are vulnerable to hate crime attacks and provides for physical protective measures such as alarms, fencing and access control. The fifth year of the scheme recently closed, and successful applicants will be announced in due course.

Funding in the region of £38,500 was allocated to one place of worship in Wales in year four (2019/2020). The scheme is open to places of worship across England and Wales, and we will continue to promote the scheme across Wales for future rounds of funding.

The Jewish Community Protective Security Grant was introduced in 2015 following a series of terrorist attacks against Jews and Jewish locations across Europe. For 2019-20 a grant of £14m was provided to fund additional protective security measures, primarily guarding, at Jewish state, free and independent schools, colleges, nurseries and some other Jewish community sites, including synagogues. A grant of £14m is to be provided in 2020-21. We do not keep a breakdown of funding by region.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-02-05/12907/>

Information about the Places of Worship Protective Security Fund, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/places-of-worship-security-funding-scheme>

Information about the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-grants-14-million-funding-for-security-at-jewish-institutions>

Broadband: Religious Buildings

Margaret Hodge (Labour) [77482] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what representations he has received from (a) churches and (b) faith groups on the barriers to broadband access for places of worship that do not have a postcode.

Matt Warman: We understand the importance for broadband access in places of worship to help improve connectivity for local communities, as well as practical benefits for such premises, including streaming services, security, and accepting contactless donations or administration.

The Government has been in discussion with representatives from the Church of England, in particular, regarding the issue of broadband access where places of worship do not have postcodes, or are otherwise missing from telecom provider databases. In some cases this leads to issues in identifying and providing service to such locations.

Over 31,000 premises are listed in relevant databases accessible to the Government as being used as places of worship. Of these, approximately 86% of premises used for religious purposes in Great Britain can access Superfast broadband speeds or better on fixed networks, compared to the UK average of 95%. Approximately 4% of premises used for religious purposes in Great Britain cannot access 'decent broadband' speeds of 10 Megabit/s on Fixed networks, compared to the UK average of 2%, largely due to their rurality. However, 4G data services are also widely available, and this reduces the number of such listed places of worship with no potential service to less than 0.2% of the total.

We are working with relevant stakeholders, including telecom operators and Ofcom, to ascertain the extent of this problem, and how many religious premises are still facing barriers. Part of this is about ensuring data used by operators is up to date and consistent with the data available to the Government. But it is also about identifying appropriate solutions, including ensuring all broadband technology solutions that are available to places of worship are considered.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-21/77482/>

Bus Services: Faith Schools and Private Education

Karen Bradley (Conservative) [77601] To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will (a) extend the temporary exemption for fee paying school children on non-Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations compliant transport and (b) allow for more fare-paying passengers for children travelling to faith schools.

Rachel Maclean: This Government is committed to building an inclusive transport system which allows all passengers to travel on accessible modes of transport. We recognise however that the Covid19 pandemic has hit the coach industry hard and this has had an adverse impact on coach operator's ability to invest in compliant vehicles.

We have therefore offered a further time-limited exemption for closed door home-to-school services until the end of the 2020/21 academic year. We anticipate that this will enable home to school services to continue to operate, enabling children to get to school, including private and faith schools.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-21/77601/>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Marriage: Coronavirus

Robert Halfon (Conservative) [76667] To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, if his Department will review the limit of 30 people attending wedding ceremonies as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased.

Robert Halfon (Conservative) [76668] To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what his timescale is for further updating the policy on restrictions on the number of guests at wedding ceremonies as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased.

Penny Mordaunt: The Government is working closely with stakeholders in the wedding industry, the Places of Worship Taskforce, and the National Panel for Registration to keep our COVID-19 secure marriages and civil partnerships policies and guidance under review.

From 15 August 2020 receptions and other celebrations for weddings and civil partnerships can take place in a COVID-19 secure venue, however, this does not apply in areas under local restrictions. Capacity at wedding or civil partnership ceremonies (including the couple, guests, and third-party suppliers, but not venue staff or third-party catering staff) should be no more than 30 and safely accommodated with social distancing in a COVID-19 secure venue. We will reassess guidance in relation to larger wedding receptions in line with the development of the scientific advice. Further guidance on wedding and civil partnership ceremonies and receptions can be found [here](#).

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-20/76667/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-20/76668/>

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House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Sanctions

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [77582] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether it remains the Government's policy not to support the boycott of Israeli (a) goods and (b) services.

James Cleverly: The British Government has made its position on boycotts/sanctions clear. We are firmly opposed to boycotts/sanctions against Israel. We believe that open and honest discussions, rather than supporting anti-Israeli boycotts, best supports our efforts to help progress in the peace process and achieve a negotiated solution.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-21/77582/>

Middle East: International Assistance

Steve McCabe (Labour) [78492] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether he plans to allocate funding to the People-to-People Partnership for Peace Fund upon its creation.

James Cleverly: The UK remains committed to making progress towards a two-state solution. We welcome efforts towards peace. We also support the growth of civil society in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and efforts to improve the Palestinian economy. We will continue to monitor the People-to-People Partnership for Peace Fund as it progresses through the US legislative system.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-22/78492/>

Israel: Palestinians

Sharon Hodgson (Labour) [77538] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 20 July 2020 to Question 73751 on Israel: Palestinians, for what reason the UK's People-to-People programme ended without alternative provision being established to help ensure continued UK support for co-existence projects in Israel-Palestine.

James Cleverly: As the Chancellor has set out, like many other nations across the world the UK is experiencing a severe economic downturn as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the likely decrease in the size of the economy this year, the First Secretary chaired a review process across government looking at all strands of the ODA budget, evaluating the impacts of spend and making sure the UK can maintain operational capacity. This process also has made sure there is continued support for five ODA priorities; bottom billion poverty reduction, climate change, girls' education, Covid-19 and Britain as a force for good.

All ODA spending Departments will now work with respective partners to make these savings in a responsible and efficient way.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-21/77538/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-14/73751/>

Occupied Territories: Coronavirus

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) [78728] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made to the Israeli authorities on the demolition of a covid-19 testing centre in Hebron; and what steps he is taking to support the Occupied Palestinian Territories in managing the covid-19 pandemic.

James Cleverly: We are concerned by the reports of a recent demolition of a COVID-19 testing centre in Hebron. We have not to date made representations on this particular case but have repeatedly made clear to the Israeli authorities our view that demolitions, in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, are contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The UK is providing vital support to help respond to COVID-19 in the OPTs. Our \$1 million funding contribution will enable the World Health Organization and UNICEF to purchase and co-ordinate the delivery of medical equipment, treat critical care patients, train frontline public health personnel and scale up laboratory testing capacity.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-22/78728/>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel/OPT: Respecting Fundamental Rights in Gaza is Pre-Condition to Achieving Peace, says UN Human Rights Expert

A United Nations human rights expert has expressed deep concerns about the recent rise in armed violence in Gaza, and has welcomed the announcement on Monday that Israel and Hamas have reached a truce to halt the current hostilities.

However, Michael Lynk, special rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, cautioned that true peace, and the badly-needed reconstruction of Gaza, will only come with full respect of the fundamental rights of the two million Palestinians living there.

“Gaza has been reduced to a humanitarian whisper,” said Lynk. “Behind the current

hostilities – the launching of rockets and incendiary balloons by Palestinian armed groups and the disproportionate use of targeted missile strikes by Israel – is the long-term impoverishment of Gaza by Israel’s 13-year-old comprehensive blockade. This amounts to collective punishment of the entire civilian population in Gaza, which adds immeasurably to the suffering of Gazans and wider tensions in the region.” ...

“Instead of meaningful steps to end the blockade of Gaza to relieve civilians, Israel has maintained its tight grip. We are no longer on the edge of a humanitarian crisis, but in the middle of one. This is purely a human-made disaster, and could be quickly reversed if the political will existed,” said Lynk.

“This blockade has no meaningful security rationale,” he added. “It inflicts great misery on the two million civilians in Gaza, while imposing little harm on any security targets. Israel remains the occupying power, and international law – including Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention – strictly forbids the use of collective punishment by the occupier.” ... Beyond lifting the blockade, he called for construction of a Gaza seaport, building of new power, water and sewage treatment plants, access for the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Marine natural gas field off Gaza’s coast, a substantial increase in export permits from Gaza and work permits in Israel, an industrial zone, the entry of much larger quantities of construction materials, and freedom of movement for Gazans. ...

The full press release can be read at

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26201&LanglD=E>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

International Monetary Fund: Lebanon

John Howell (Conservative) [76657] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 13 July 2020 to Question 71019 on Loans: Lebanon, if he will make representations to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the potential misuse of IMF loan packages in Lebanon by Hezbollah.

John Glen: HMT officials are in discussion with the IMF, through the UK’s delegation at the IMF, on the situation in Lebanon and options for IMF economic support. Any new programme needs to be agreed with a new Government, who will succeed the current caretaker arrangement, to ensure that all commitments can be delivered and implemented. No new programme is able to be proposed at this interim stage, so a formal view on the adequacy of safeguards is not possible.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-20/76657/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-08/71019/>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Hezbollah and Yemen: Weapons

John Lamont (Conservative) [77766] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent estimate his Department has made of the (a) weapons arsenals and (b) origin of weaponry of (i) Hezbollah and (ii) the Houthis.

John Lamont (Conservative) [77766] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and

Commonwealth Affairs, what recent estimate his Department has made of the (a) weapons arsenals and (b) origin of weaponry of (i) Hezbollah and (ii) the Houthis.

James Cleverly: The UK remains concerned by reports that Hizballah continues to amass an arsenal of weapons in breach of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701. We regularly raise this at the UN Security Council, and we call on all parties to abide by the provisions of the relevant UNSCRs. The UK is also concerned that, according to the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, military equipment of Iranian origin was introduced into Yemen after the imposition of the targeted arms embargo, in violation of Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015). This reaffirms our concerns about destabilising Iranian activity in Yemen and the wider region.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-21/77766/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-21/77766/>

Migrant Camps: Humanitarian Aid

Jim Shannon (DUP) [77623] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent steps the Government has taken to help ensure the effective delivery of aid to refugee camps in (a) Yemen, (b) Syria and (c) South Sudan.

James Cleverly: In Yemen through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), DFID has supported 224 teachers' salaries for refugee and IDP affected areas from July 2020 to February 2021. This funding covers gaps where existing teachers' salaries have stopped or are under threat. UK aid has provided £10.8 million to UNHCR to assist refugees and IDPs in Yemen since 2017. This includes over 5,000 refugee children supported with child protection activities, and counselling to over 3,000 survivors of gender-based violence.

In South Sudan the UK funds several programmes that help support refugees. The UK-Unilever water and sanitation partnership, UNHCR and Save the Children help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in refugee populations and host communities across the country. DFID-funded education programmes in South Sudan ensure IDP and refugee children have access to quality education despite the multiple barriers they face. The UK works with the UN, NGOs and the Red Cross to ensure that life-saving supplies get to the most vulnerable communities. COVID-19 containment measures have made this more difficult, so DFID works closely with the Government and others to ensure that the movement of humanitarian supplies and personnel are impacted as little as possible.

In Syria. Most of the humanitarian need is among internally displaced persons, now totalling 6.1million. DFID continues to support Palestinian refugees in Syria through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Syria programme, to which the UK has contributed £36m since 2017. UNRWA is the only agency mandated to provide services to this population and often the only organisation with the access, permission, and mandate required to assist Palestinian refugees.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-21/77623/>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

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

**** Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill**

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/hate-crime-and-public-order-scotland-bill>

Stage 1 Report: Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee

<https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnp.azureedge.net/published/DPLR/2020/8/27/Hate-Crime-and-Public-Order--Scotland--Bill--Stage-1/DPLRS052020R46.pdf>

Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-scotland-bill>

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