



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Online Hate Speech and Extremism

Mick Whitley (Labour): What recent discussions [has the Minister] had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling online hate speech and extremism. [906705]

Julie Elliott (Labour): What recent discussions [has the Minister] had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling online hate speech and extremism. [906722]

Kate Osborne (Labour): What recent discussions [has the Minister] had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling online hate speech and extremism. [906742]

The Minister for Security (James Brokenshire): As a Government, we are committed to vigorously countering extremist ideology by making sure that every part of government is taking action. That includes ongoing conversations between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office on the implementation of the online harms framework to tackle hateful content. We will continue to work across government to challenge extremism in all its forms.

Mick Whitley: At a Home Affairs Committee session last week, the national lead for counter-terrorism, Neil Basu, warned of growing numbers of young people being drawn towards right-wing terrorism. During this pandemic, social media have done much to amplify hateful extremism. What steps will the Minister take to prevent young people from being drawn into extremism?

James Brokenshire: The hon. Gentleman highlights an important point about the exploitation of the online world to attract the unwary and what that can lead to, which is why we are working with the companies concerned to see that content is removed. I highlight the online harms work, which will lead to a new regime to put new responsibilities on those companies to provide support in respect of the challenge of extremism and content that might not be illegal but profoundly is harmful.

Julie Elliott: A recent Home Affairs Committee session heard that Facebook had deleted 9.6 million posts about hate speech in the first quarter of this year. The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Sub-Committee on which I serve has considered online disinformation during covid. What assessment has the Minister made of the links between hate speech

and disinformation? Is there discussion between his Department and the DCMS?

James Brokenshire: As I indicated in response to the previous question, we are in discussion with the DCMS about these issues. It troubles me that sometimes this disinformation and these conspiracy theories can be used to galvanise more extremist behaviour. We are very alive to that in terms of working with our colleagues at the DCMS and in terms of our broader work in the Prevent space where this issue can move into terrorism. The issue of the extreme right-wing and far-right extremists seeking to exploit the online world and trap some quite young people is something we are very focused on and conscious of.

Kate Osborne: For two weeks running, we have seen anti-lockdown conspiracy theorists clashing with police throughout the country, with four people having been arrested in Newcastle over the weekend. This behaviour is being fuelled online by far-right opportunists and some high-profile individuals, such as Ian Brown of the Stone Roses. Will the Minister outline what his Department is doing to build trust in Government information and in respect of scepticism and concern about vaccination?

James Brokenshire: I highlight to the hon. Lady the work that is being led by the DCMS, with which we are working on the cross-Whitehall counter-disinformation unit, which has been stood up during this time of acute disinformation to challenge some of the conspiracy theories and false information. I assure her that there is extensive work across government to analyse and then work with the companies to take false or misleading information down. Clearly, it is an ongoing challenge, but we are determined to take firm action where false narratives are being perpetrated.

Bambos Charalambous (Labour): The scale and accessibility of hateful extremist content online is deeply worrying and causing serious damage to society, and it needs to be identified speedily and dealt with. Last week, in her evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, the commissioner for countering extremism called for a more rigorous classification system for assessing hateful extremist material in the online harms Bill to get to grips with the vast spread of extremism online. Does the Minister support this call, and does he agree with the commission's report last year that the Government's counter-extremism strategy, drawn up in 2015, is insufficient, too broad and out of date?

James Brokenshire: The 2015 strategy was the first of its kind in the world in having a unit dedicated to countering extremism. I pay tribute to the work of the commissioner, and I read very carefully her words to the Select Committee last week. We will work with the commissioner—indeed, the Home Secretary met her last week—and we are working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Ofcom to consider the appropriate design for the regulatory framework. We will continue to develop this as we prepare to introduce the legislation, and we will consider the commissioner's proposals as part of that work.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-09-28/debates/27404EC0-8F80-4CAB-B9A7-0B612AA59FAB/OnlineHateSpeechAndExtremism>

The transcript of the Home Affairs Committee meeting with Neil Basu and the commissioner for countering extremism, referred to above, can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/901/html/>

The transcript of the Home Affairs Committee meeting relating hate speech on facebook, referred to above, can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/359/default/>

(see Q544)

The strategy referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470088/51859_Cm9148_Accessible.pdf

House of Commons Written Answer

Hate Crime: Females

Catherine McKinnell (Labour) [81895] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to tackle misogyny and racism experienced by Muslim women.

Victoria Atkins: This government recognises the discrimination and intolerance faced by Muslim communities. We have some of the strongest legislation in the world to tackle hate crime and, where groups incite racial hatred or are engaged in racially or religiously motivated criminal activity, we would expect them to be prosecuted.

The Government has taken steps to combat anti-Muslim Hatred through supporting Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) with just over £2.8m between 2016 and 2020 to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred.

In addition, the Places of Worship protective security funding scheme, which provides security measures for mosques and other places of worship, has been allocated £3.2m for 2020-21, double what was awarded last year.

We also funded a national public awareness hate crime campaign in 2018 and 2019 which includes a specific example of anti-Muslim hatred to make clear the Government's position that such incidents are unacceptable and are a crime.

The Home Office have also funded specific locally targeted projects including through the Building Stronger Britain Together programme tackling both the far right and perceptions of Islamophobia

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-08-28/81895>

Information about the Places of Worship protective security funding scheme, referred to above, can be read at

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

Information about the Building a Stronger Britain Together programme, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/building-a-stronger-britain-together>

House of Lords Written Answer

New IRA: Weapons

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL8308] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that the New IRA has imported weapons from Hezbollah.

Viscount Younger of Leckie: The Noble Baroness will be aware that in August officers from the Police Service of Northern Ireland made a number of arrests under the Terrorism Act in connection with an ongoing investigation into the activities of the New IRA. Ten people have now been charged with a range of terrorism offences. To ensure that any subsequent prosecutorial proceedings are not compromised, it would not be appropriate to comment further at this stage.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-21/hl8308>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Jim Shannon (DUP) (931) National Day of Prayer – That this House notes the unprecedented position that the covid-19 pandemic has brought the nation to; further notes that in this time of economic and societal uncertainty the country should follow the lead of

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and recognise the importance of prayer when Her Majesty said in her 2013 address that prayer helps us to renew ourselves; and calls on the Prime Minister to initiate a National Day of Prayer to enable those for whom this is important to seek God for strength, peace, comfort, hope, wisdom, forgiveness and even joy at this difficult time.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/57484/national-day-of-prayer>

Charity Commission

Updated Guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for the charity sector

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector>

Scottish Government

Updated Guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19): wedding ceremonies and civil partnership registrations

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnership-registrations/>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answer

Middle East: Diplomatic Relations

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [91009] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment his Department has made of the potential of the deal signed by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Israel to normalise relations between those countries and the Middle East peace process.

James Cleverly: We warmly welcome the agreement between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. This is a historic step which sees the normalisation of relations between three great friends of the UK. We welcome both the decision to normalise relations, as well as the suspension of plans for annexation - a move the UK has opposed as it would have been counterproductive to securing peace in the region. We profoundly hope that this moment can be used as a step towards direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, as there can be no substitute in order to reach a two-state solution and a lasting peace.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-16/91009>

United Nations

Statement of H.E. President Mahmoud Abbas President of the State of Palestine UN General Assembly General Debate of the 75th Session 25 September 2020

... Until when, ladies and gentlemen, will the question of Palestine remain without a just solution as enshrined in United Nations resolutions? Until when will the Palestinian people remain under Israeli occupation and will the question of millions of Palestine refugees remain without a just solution in accordance with what the United Nations has determined

over 70 years ago? ...

The Palestinian people have been present in their homeland, Palestine, the land of their ancestors, for over 6000 years, and they will continue living on this land, steadfast in the face of occupation, aggression and the disappointments and betrayals, until the fulfilment of their rights. Despite all they have endured and continue to endure, despite the unjust blockade that targets our national decision, we will not kneel or surrender and we will not deviate from our fundamental positions, and we shall overcome, God willing. ...

We have always sought a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, and we have agreed to all the initiatives presented to us. ...

What did Israel, the occupying Power, do in return? It violated all agreements signed with us, undermined the two-State solution through its oppressive practices of killing and maiming, arrests, home demolitions, asphyxiating our economy, and systematically acting to alter the character and identity of occupied Jerusalem, attacking its Muslim and Christian holy sites, notably Al-Aqsa Mosque, and pursuing its settler colonialism on our land and against our people, ignoring the Arab Peace Initiative for peace and actively attempting now to kill another opportunity for peace through reckless unilateral measures.

Finally, it announces normalization agreements with both the UAE and Bahrain, in violation of the Arab Peace Initiative, and the terms of reference of a comprehensive, lasting and just solution in accordance with international law. ...

Those who believe the Palestinian people can coexist with the occupation or be subdued by pressure and diktats are under an illusion, as are those who are being misled to believe that they can circumvent our people, who bear this struggle and are its only address. Let everyone know there will be no peace, no security, no stability and no coexistence in our region while this occupation continues and a just, comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the conflict, remains denied. ...

I salute the great Palestinian people that bravely pursues the struggle for freedom and independence. I salute our martyrs, prisoners and wounded. I salute Jerusalem and our people who remain steadfast in its holy sites. I salute our people in the besieged Gaza Strip. I salute our people in the refugee camps everywhere. I salute all those who stand with us and with our rights from all countries, nations and organizations. ...

To read the full transcript see

https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20200925/3Yf6QppA2NrI/TNW70VITvwUN_en.pdf

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Foreign Affairs

See the House of Lords written answer “New IRA: Weapons” in the Home Affairs section above.

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2592>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

Genocide Determination Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2621>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2608>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2584>

Scottish Parliament

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

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

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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Consultations

** new or updated today

Getting Married: A Consultation Paper on Weddings Law (closing date 3 December 2020)

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/weddings/#weddings-consultation-paper>

Hate crime laws (closing date 24 December 2020)

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/hate-crime/>

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