



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Voluntary Work

Ben Lake (Plaid Cymru) [43132] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the Answer of 4 May 2020 to Question 41576, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on enabling furloughed workers employed by faith-based organisations to participate in activities usually undertaken by volunteers in their faith community.

John Whittingdale: DCMS is working with other Government departments and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to identify areas where volunteers can contribute to the COVID-19 response.

The purpose of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is to support people who would otherwise have been made redundant. To prevent fraudulent claims, the Government has made clear that furloughed individuals cannot continue to work or volunteer for their organisation.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-04/43132/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-29/41576/>

Marriage: Coronavirus

Hilary Benn (Labour) [42904] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has plans to allow marriage ceremonies to take place with social distancing after the covid-19 lockdown.

Kevin Foster: Marriages and Civil Partnerships are not currently taking place. This position remains under review in line with any changes to Public Health guidelines.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-04/42904/>

Marriage: Coronavirus

Hilary Benn (Labour) [42905] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he plans to bring forward legislative proposals to amend the law on marriage to allow marriages to take place during the covid-19 lockdown.

Alex Chalk: The Government acknowledges the significant upheaval that Covid-19 is causing for couples who were looking to marry at this time. We are exploring what changes might be possible to facilitate marriages at this time, and in line with Public Health England guidance on social distancing.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-04/42905/>

See also the written answer "Muslim Brotherhood" in the Foreign Affairs Section below

Muslim Brotherhood

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [41003] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of a potential increase in the activity of the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK as a result of the economic downturn during the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Atkins: The Government keeps under review the activities of those associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK in accordance with the five commitments included in the former Prime Minister's statement to Parliament.

The Government's five commitments from the review are to:

- refuse visas to members and associates of the Muslim Brotherhood, in line with our existing policy guidelines and our approach to all forms of extremism;
- seek to ensure charities that have links to the Muslim Brotherhood are not misused to support or finance the Muslim Brotherhood instead of their lawful charitable purpose;
- strengthen liaison arrangements with international partners to ensure that allegations of illicit funding or other misuse of charities are robustly investigated and appropriate action taken;
- enforce the EU asset freeze on Hamas; and
- keep under review whether the views and activities of the Muslim Brotherhood meet the legal test for proscription.

We have made no assessment on any increase in activity resulting from the economic situation.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-28/41003/>

House of Lords Written Answer

Marriage

Baroness Cox (Crossbench) [HL3013] To ask Her Majesty's Government what progress they have made on their commitment in the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, published 14 March 2018, to "explore the legal and practical challenges of limited reform relating to the law on marriage and religious weddings".

Lord Keen of Elie: The Government continues the exploration of both limited reform and non-legislative options that it began in detail last Spring. We are doing so with the greatest care. Any proposals affecting how religious groups are permitted to conduct marriages must be thoroughly assessed for their fairness to all religious groups and for how far they could achieve the change of practice intended.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-22/HL3013/>

The Green Paper referred to above can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

Conservative Party

Islamophobia: Independent Investigation Terms of Reference

<https://www.conservatives.com/investigation>

Equalities and Human Rights Commission

Complaints raised about Islamophobia in the Conservative Party

An Equality and Human Rights Commission spokesperson said: “We have given very careful consideration to complaints raised about discrimination and islamophobia in the Conservative Party. We have concluded, in the light of the decision by the Party to institute an independent investigation, that it would not be proportionate to initiate our own investigation at this stage. We will be monitoring the review and requiring the party to provide regular updates on progress. If we are not satisfied with progress or how the investigation is conducted we will review our decision and do not rule out the use of our legal powers.”

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/news/complaints-raised-about-islamophobia-conservative-party>

Muslim Council of Britain

Conservative investigation into prejudice and discrimination branded “a facade” by Muslim Council of Britain

The Muslim Council of Britain today described the Conservative Party’s investigation into discrimination a ‘façade’ following the publication of the terms of reference into the inquiry. The terms once again deflect the very real problem of Islamophobia in party.

Harun Khan, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, said: “We have previously described the Conservative Party’s attitude to Islamophobia as one of denial, dismissal and deceit. The publication of the terms of reference for its inquiry reflects that regrettable attitude. They are a façade to hide the hundreds of incidences of Islamophobic bigotry we have identified in its ranks. In sum, it seems even today, the Conservative Party refuses to acknowledge that there can be bigotry and prejudice directed at Muslims. ...

“By restricting the terms to an inquiry merely into the complaints received, the Party is choosing to summarily dismiss all the issues of the toxic culture of racism that have been raised by the Muslim Council of Britain and many others. ... Whilst it is clear that Islamophobia is not treated equally to other forms of racism in the public domain including by many public bodies, we still hold out hope that many will see through this facade, and we can – sooner rather than later – have a true independent inquiry into Islamophobia in the Party.”

To read the full press release see

<https://mcb.org.uk/general/conservative-investigation-into-prejudice-and-discrimination-branded-a-facade-by-muslim-council-of-britain/>

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House of Commons Oral Answers

Covid-19: Israeli and Palestinian Authority Co-operation

Stephen Crabb (Conservative): What recent reports he has received on Israeli co-operation with the Palestinian Authority in tackling covid-19. [902371]

Steve McCabe (Labour): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Israeli-Palestinian co-operation in tackling covid-19. [902373]

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly): We welcome the ongoing co-operation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority towards tackling covid-19, a matter I was pleased to discuss directly with the Israeli ambassador to the UK and the Palestinian Prime Minister recently. UN agencies, the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority are working together to ensure essential medical supplies and staff reach the most vulnerable areas, including Gaza. We encourage continued positive interaction between Israel and the Palestinian authorities in their efforts to fight covid-19.

Stephen Crabb: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the UN special co-ordinator for the middle east peace process recently praised the way the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority have been working together to tackle covid-19. Does he agree that that kind of practical co-operation—the building of trust and meeting shared challenges head on—is the way that peace will get built in the region? Will he step up his efforts to encourage genuine negotiations based on the two-state solution?

James Cleverly: In conversations I have had with both representatives of the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority I have praised the way they have worked together on this matter. I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend that international co-operation is the way that we, as the international community, will fight it. As the Prime Minister said at the coronavirus global response international pledging conference he co-hosted in May, the race for a vaccine is not a competition between countries, but the most urgent shared endeavour of our lifetime. If the attitudes we bring into fighting this disease can be more broadly applied, I think the world would be a better place.

Steve McCabe: I thank the Minister for his comments. Will he join me in welcoming the news that Israel has approved a \$230 million advance payment to the Palestinian Authority, alongside coronavirus test kits, intensive care beds, ventilators, drugs and protective equipment? Is that not exactly the kind of behaviour we should welcome and encourage?

James Cleverly: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the points he makes. We have indeed commented positively to the Israeli Government on how they have worked with the Palestinian Authority. I made the same point to Palestinian Authority representatives on the way they have worked with the Israeli Government. It shows a pattern of co-operation that should be replicated. I hope it is a step towards building trust that will enable a sustainable peaceful solution to the situation in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. ...

Wayne David (Labour): Thank you, Mr Speaker. As has been said, there is encouraging co-operation between Israelis and Palestinians with regard to covid-19. I am sure the Minister agrees that that highlights how wrong it is for a new Israeli Government to pursue a policy of illegal annexation of large parts of the west bank. What are the Government doing to mobilise international opinion against that annexation?

James Cleverly: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place, although it is virtual. The UK Government have expressed, both publicly and to the Government of Israel, our concerns about reports of annexation, which we have consistently said we oppose and could be detrimental to the chances of the peaceful, sustainable

two-state solution that we should all be working towards.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-05-11/debates/FFE25CDD-ABC9-4CDC-BA5E-97A3F3E4DA62/Covid-19IsraeliAndPalestinianAuthorityCo-Operation>

Occupied Palestinian Territories

Tommy Sheppard (SNP) What recent representations he has made to the Government of Israel on the proposed annexation of parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. [902378]

Clive Betts (Labour): What recent discussions he has had with the Government of Israel on the proposed annexation of parts of the West Bank. [902381]

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (James Cleverly): The UK is deeply concerned about the reports that the new Israeli Government coalition have reached an agreement that may pave the way for annexation of parts of the west bank. Any unilateral move towards the annexation of parts of the west bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to restart the peace process and contradictory to international law, and might make the chances of a sustainable two-state solution harder. We recently made clear our concerns at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the middle east peace process on 23 April.

Tommy Sheppard: I appreciate the Minister's concern, but does he believe that the proposed annexation by Israel of the Palestinian territories would be illegal under international law? If so, does he think that the United Kingdom Government's response should be the same as it would be with other countries guilty of illegal annexation, such as Russia?

James Cleverly: Our long-standing position is that such a move would be contrary to international law. We continue to have a constructive relationship with both the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and we will continue to work towards a peaceful resolution that takes us to a sustainable two-state solution. That is our long-standing position, and we continue to work towards it.

Clive Betts: I am pleased to hear the Minister condemn any proposed annexation of territories in the west bank by the Israeli Government. Will he go further and accept that such an annexation would render any future Palestinian state unviable, would destroy its geographical integrity, and as such would render a two-state solution obsolete? Is it not absolutely essential that the Government act now with others to stop the Israelis annexing territory in the way that they currently intend?

James Cleverly: As I said, our long-standing position is that we do not support the annexation of parts of the west bank, as doing so could make a sustainable two-state solution harder. We support actions by the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority that take us closer to a sustainable two-state solution, and we express our concerns about anything that might put that at risk.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-05-11/debates/A7E46890-26D7-44E5-9CEA-62C28416E0E0/OccupiedPalestinianTerritories>

House of Commons Written Answers

Overseas Trade: Israel

Alexander Stafford (Conservative) [42244] To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what steps she is taking to strengthen the UK's trade relationship with Israel in medical research and development during the covid-19 pandemic.

Greg Hands: UK and Israeli experts have been closely cooperating on medical research and development throughout the course of the COVID-19 response, including in relation to testing, clinical response, epidemiological management, and

the development of vaccines and treatments. This cooperation has been extremely helpful to both sides and has resulted in a number of opportunities for further collaboration.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-01/42244/>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Textbooks

Stephen Crabb (Conservative) [41933] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 20 March 2020 to Question 28578 on Palestinians: Textbooks, whether the Georg Eckert Institute's interim report into Palestinian Authority school textbooks will be published in full without redaction; and if she will place a copy of the preliminary findings in the Library after the expected publication of the interim report in June 2020.

Steve McCabe (Labour) [42246] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with reference to the Answer of 8 July 2019 to Question 272116 on Palestinians: schools, whether the initial international review covering the first 70 textbooks will be published in Spring 2020; and when that review will be placed in the Library.

James Cleverly: The UK government is deeply concerned about allegations of incitement in Palestinian Authority's school textbooks.

Following UK calls for action, we secured agreement from European partners to commission the Georg Eckert Institute to conduct an independent review, which is currently underway. We expect an interim report by June, with a full report later in the year.

We have regular discussions with our European Partners on the Review and we continue to encourage the EU to publish the report. The issue was most recently raised on 18 February by the UK Consul General Jerusalem with the EU Representative in Jerusalem.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-01/41933/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-01/42246/>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-03-12/28578/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-07-02/272116/>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Andy Slaughter (Labour) (464) Proposed Israeli annexation of part of the West Bank

– That this House notes with concern the plans of the new Israeli coalition government to annex part of the occupied West Bank; further notes that Israeli legislation can progress from 1 July 2020 to carry out such an annexation; highlights that any such annexation of territory occupied in 1967 is a breach of international law which rejects any acquisition of territory through force and that it would be a major threat to peace; notes that when Russia illegally annexed the Crimea in 2014, the UK joined EU partners in imposing sanctions on that country; calls on the Government to make clear to the Israeli Government that such a step will have severe consequences for the UK-Israel relationship; and further calls on the

Government to introduce sanctions similar to those imposed on Russia in the event that an annexation of occupied territory takes place.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/56954/proposed-israeli-annexation-of-part-of-the-west-bank>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

In light of COVID-19 crisis, UN officials call for immediate release of all children in detention, including Palestinian children: Joint Press Statement from Jamie McGoldrick, Humanitarian Coordinator in the occupied Palestinian territory, Genevieve Boutin, UNICEF Special Representative in State of Palestine, and James Heenan, Head of the UN Human Rights Office in the occupied Palestinian territory

We are seriously concerned over the continued detention of Palestinian children by Israeli authorities. At the end of March, 194 Palestinian children were detained by the Israeli authorities in prisons and detention centres, mainly in Israel, according to data released by the Israeli Prison Service. This is higher than the monthly average number of children detained in 2019. Of the total, the vast majority of these children have not been convicted of any offence but are being held in pre-trial detention.

The rights of children to protection, safety and wellbeing must be upheld at all times. In normal times, the arrest or detention of a child should be a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. This is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which both Israel and State of Palestine have ratified.

During a pandemic, States should pay increased attention to children's protection needs and children's rights, and the best interests of children should be a primary consideration in all actions taken by Governments.

Children in detention face heightened risk of contracting COVID-19, with physical distancing and other preventive measures often absent or difficult to achieve. Moreover, since the start of the COVID-19 crisis in Israel, legal proceedings are on hold, almost all prison visits are cancelled, and children are denied in-person access to their families and their lawyers. This creates additional hardship, psychological suffering, and prevents the child from receiving the legal advice to which they are entitled. For children awaiting trial, these pressures could put them under increased pressure to incriminate themselves, pleading guilty to be released faster.

The best way to uphold the rights of detained children amidst a dangerous pandemic, in any country, is to release them from detention and to put a moratorium on new admissions into detention facilities. We call on the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to do so immediately.

<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/light-covid-19-crisis-un-officials-call-immediate-release-all-children-detention-including>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

See also the written answer "Muslim Brotherhood" in the Home Affairs Section above
Muslim Brotherhood

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [41004] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the global economic downturn on trends in the level of recruitment activity by the Muslim Brotherhood overseas.

James Cleverly: The British Government continues to take concerns about the Muslim Brotherhood seriously and keeps under review the activities undertaken by the Muslim Brotherhood's associates overseas. We monitor closely the risk that any movement might seek to take advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic to spread their influence, exploiting this unprecedented global health challenge to target vulnerable people and communities; and remain committed to combatting any groups which represent a threat to global security and stability.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-04-28/41004/>

House of Lords Written Answer

Iran: Arms Trade

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL3655] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the forthcoming expiration of the UN-imposed arms embargo on Iran in October 2020 on stability in the Middle East and the security of UK allies.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) is a reciprocal deal: it lifts sanctions in exchange for tough nuclear limits. Iran has broken the nuclear limits in the JCPoA and we are working to bring Iran back into compliance through the deal's Dispute Resolution Mechanism.

UNSCR 2231, which underpins the JCPoA, includes a number of clauses designed to allow sanctions to expire on fixed dates: the UN conventional arms embargo is due to expire in October 2020. We have repeatedly set out concerns about Iranian destabilising behaviour, including proliferation to non-state actors. UNSCRs 1540, 2216 and 1701, which prohibit the proliferation of weapons to the Houthis and Lebanese Hizballah, will remain in place after the arms embargo expires. The EU arms embargo and UN ballistic missile restrictions will also remain in place until 2023. We are consulting partners on the broader implications of arms embargo expiry and encourage all states to implement national export control best practice.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-04-28/HL3655/>

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Other Relevant Information

United Nations

Secretary-General Denounces 'Tsunami' of Xenophobia Unleashed amid COVID-19, Calling for All-Out Effort against Hate Speech

... COVID-19 does not care who we are, where we live, what we believe or about any other distinction. We need every ounce of solidarity to tackle it together. Yet the pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering. Anti-foreigner sentiment has surged online and in the streets. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have spread, and COVID-19-related anti-Muslim attacks have occurred. Migrants and refugees have been vilified as a source of the virus – and then denied access to medical treatment. With older persons among the most vulnerable, contemptible memes have emerged suggesting they are also the most expendable. And journalists, whistle-blowers, health professionals, aid workers and human rights defenders

are being targeted simply for doing their jobs.

We must act now to strengthen the immunity of our societies against the virus of hate. That's why I'm appealing today for an all-out effort to end hate speech globally.

I call on political leaders to show solidarity with all members of their societies and build and reinforce social cohesion. ...

I call on the media, especially social media companies, to do much more to flag and, in line with international human rights law, remove racist, misogynist and other harmful content.

I call on civil society to strengthen outreach to vulnerable people, and religious actors to serve as models of mutual respect.

And I ask everyone, everywhere, to stand up against hate, treat each other with dignity and take every opportunity to spread kindness. ...

Let's defeat hate speech – and COVID-19 – together.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sqsm20076.doc.htm>

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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>

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

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

General Overview

<https://tinyurl.com/ybxua3cu>

Age

<https://tinyurl.com/yah3y6ut>

Blasphemy

<https://tinyurl.com/y7sd3yln>

Protection of Freedom of Expression

<https://tinyurl.com/y9ealbhe>

Racial Hatred

<https://tinyurl.com/ya3smpqe>

Sex/Gender

<https://tinyurl.com/yck2cdod>

Transgender Identity & Variations in Sex Characteristics

<https://tinyurl.com/y8unx9m4>

Statutory Aggravations

<https://tinyurl.com/yamathua>

What is Stirring Up Hatred?

<https://tinyurl.com/y7uwdoz4>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Protecting places of worship (closing date 28 June 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/protecting-places-of-worship-consultation>

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill (closing date 24 July 2020)

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/115038.aspx>

Legislative proposals for religion, values and ethics [Wales] (closing date 28 July 2020)

<https://gov.wales/legislative-proposals-religion-values-and-ethics>

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