



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Religious Buildings: Coronavirus

Stephen Timms (Labour) [47171] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, under what circumstances the Government plans to authorise the re-opening of places of worship; and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall: On 11 May, the Government launched the document “Our Plan to Rebuild”, which outlined the steps it would be taking to ease the lockdown restrictions;

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our plan to rebuild The UK Government s COVID-19 recovery strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our_plan_to_rebuild_The_UK_Government_s_COVID-19_recovery_strategy.pdf)

As the document makes clear, the Government’s ambition is to reopen places of worship, with the current assumption that this will be no earlier than 4 July. The Government’s priority is to protect the public and save lives. We are committed to ensuring our faith communities have access to the latest public health advice, and to support them to adapt their practices in line with the Government’s COVID-19 guidance.

As part of the recovery strategy, the Government has launched a Places of Worship Taskforce to look at how places of worship can reopen and operate safely. The first meeting took place on 15 May. Meetings are being led by the Secretary of State for Communities, or the Faith Minister, and comprise of representatives from the country’s major faiths. The Taskforce will work towards the safe reopening of places of worship, including for individual prayer, and services and ceremonies such as weddings. It will also address the specific issues that places of worship face in the course of reopening safely.

Places of worship are essential in bringing our communities together, which is why we want them to reopen them as soon as we can. However, no place of worship will be able to reopen before a final decision by the Government and the accompanying changes to the legal position in the published regulations. Even after we permit places of worship to reopen fully, some may choose to reopen in stages

or at a slower pace depending on their local circumstances.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-15/47171/>

House of Lords Written Answer

Hospitals: Ministers of Religion

Lord Roberts of Llandudno (Liberal Democrat) [HL4185] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the contribution of NHS hospital chaplains during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lord Bethell: We have not made a formal assessment of the contribution of National Health Service chaplains during the COVID-19 pandemic. NHS England and NHS Improvement recognise the importance of chaplains, and leaders of all faiths, in the delivery of high-quality palliative and end of life care. The significant role they play in spiritual, emotional and psychological care is recognised in our clinical guides for palliative care in hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic and for compassionate visiting arrangements.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-05-12/HL4185/>

Scottish Parliament Oral Answer

Outdoor Weddings

John Mason (SNP): The First Minister mentioned earlier that activities that take place outside are safer than those that take place inside. Can she give any guidance about the Government's thinking on an activity, such as a wedding, that could take place in either place? Would it be possible to lift the restrictions on weddings that take place outside before we lift them on those that take place inside?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will not give a guarantee to do that specific thing. In general terms, the risks of transmission outdoors appear to be lower than the risks of transmission indoors but, even outdoors, considerations about social distancing have to be taken into account.

I understand why people want weddings to go ahead as quickly as possible, but in intimate family gatherings there will always be concerns around social distancing and transmission risks. Wedding and civil partnership ceremonies are restricted by the current regulations, which include the restrictions on gatherings in a public place. Scientific and medical evidence does not yet support allowing marriages and civil partnerships to go ahead, but we will look in more detail at the outdoor issue and, for example, extending the practice of some ceremonies taking place in private spaces, such as gardens. I see where John Mason is coming from but, in all those issues, we have to consider all the relevant factors and move as swiftly but as carefully and safely as possible.

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12649&i=114454#ScotParlOR>

Scottish Government

Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis

Includes proposals for the re-opening of places of worship

<https://tinyurl.com/ybnzwamc>

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House of Commons Written Answer

Israeli Settlements

Hilary Benn (Labour) [46562] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether the Government supports the annexation of parts of the West Bank by the Government of Israel.

James Cleverly: As we made clear at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 23 April, we are concerned by reports that the new Israeli Government coalition has reached an agreement which may pave the way for annexation of parts of the West Bank. The UK position is clear: any unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and contrary to international law. The Prime Minister reiterated our opposition to the unilateral annexation of territory during a call with Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, on 6 February.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-05-13/46562/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL3849] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the potential for the government of the United States' proposals for peace in Israel and Palestine to result in the government of Israel revoking Palestinian people's citizenship and swapping populated land.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: A peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians that leads to peaceful coexistence could unlock the potential for the entire region, and provide both sides with the opportunity for a brighter future. Only the leaders of Israel and the Palestinians can determine whether US proposals can meet the needs and aspirations of the people they represent. But we encourage them to give these plans genuine and fair consideration, and explore whether they might prove a first step on the road back to negotiations. The UK would strongly oppose any unilateral action by either party. The UK position is clear: any unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and contrary to international law.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-05-05/HL3849/>

West Bank: Demolition

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL3851] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of Israel about demolition and stop-work orders being posted on Palestinian properties in Qarawat Bani Hassan during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK is seriously concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property by Israeli authorities, which is contrary to International Humanitarian Law. During this fragile period we call on both parties to avoid any provocative action, which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-05-05/HL3851/>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Securing a peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians: Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen at the Security Council briefing on the situation in the Middle East

... I would like to begin by welcoming the swearing in of the new Israeli Government. The United Kingdom looks forward to working with this government on a whole range of bilateral and regional issues, not least peace in the Middle East.

We do, however, remain deeply concerned about the prospects of annexation of parts of the West Bank. Annexation of any part of the West Bank by Israel would be a clear violation of international law and would profoundly damage efforts to restart peace negotiations. We instead encourage the new Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work towards a lasting agreement based on a two-state solution.

To this end, the United Kingdom appreciates the proposals which the Palestinian Authority has made for renewed dialogue. As part of this, we look to the Palestinian leadership to offer detailed proposals for a settlement, and find a means of restarting discussions with the United States, who retain a key role in the Middle East Peace Process.

Mr President, we are disappointed by the announcement by President Abbas yesterday. Now is the time for more cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, not less. Security cooperation is particularly important. Instability is in no one's interest, except extremists. ...

The United Kingdom remains committed to achieving a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state; based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

We reiterate our call on the Government of Israel to halt any activity that makes peace more difficult to achieve. ... All settlements are illegal under International Humanitarian Law. Settlement construction in these highly sensitive areas threatens to further undermine the viability of a future Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem. We also remain concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property, and repeated incidents of settler violence. ...

At the same time, we call on the Palestinian Authority to tackle incitement and anti-Semitism which create a non-conducive environment for cooperation and negotiations. The United Kingdom strongly condemns the use of racist, hateful or anti-Semitic language. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/securing-a-peaceful-future-for-israelis-and-palestinians>

Dominic Raab

[British flag icon] is a strong partner of [Israeli flag icon]. Speaking to @Gantzbe today, we committed to collaborating on the global response to #COVID19 as well as discussing the importance of peace & security in the Middle East.

<https://twitter.com/DominicRaab/status/1263191721866862593>

Updated Travel Advice: Israel

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/israel>

Updated Travel Advice: The Occupied Palestinian Territories

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/the-occupied-palestinian-territories>

Scottish Parliament Motion

Motion S5M-21739.1 Richard Lyle (SNP): 72nd Anniversary of the Nakba – As an

amendment to motion S5M-21739 in the name of Sandra White (72nd Anniversary of the Nakba), insert at end "; further considers that constituents in Uddingston and Bellshill also recollect the words of Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestine Authority, in the article, *What We Have Learned and What We Should Do*, published in Falastin el Thawra, the official journal of the PLO, of Beirut, in March 1976, that 'The Arab armies entered Palestine to protect the Palestinians from what they called Zionist tyranny but, instead, abandoned Palestinians forced them to emigrate and leave their homeland imposed upon them a political and ideological blockade and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which Jews used to live in Eastern Europe. The Arab States succeeded in scattering the Palestinian people and in destroying their unity. They did not recognise them as a unified people until the States of the world did so, and this is regrettable'; understands that 20% of Israel's citizens are Arabs who chose not to flee in 1948, and who enjoy their democratic rights in Israel and contribute meaningfully to Israel society at all levels, including membership of the Knesset, with several Arabs serving as high ranking members of the Israel police and army, and believes the conclusion can only be that the Naqba, the Arabic word for tragedy, resulting in the 1948 Palestine refugee crisis was sadly a self-inflicted tragedy, which must, after all these years, be finally resolved by peaceful means and discussions between the parties involved."

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-21739.1>

The motion amended by the above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5M-21739>

United Nations

UN Middle East peace envoy warns against unilateral action on all sides, as Israel threatens West Bank annexation

The UN's Middle East peace envoy issued a stern warning on Wednesday against any unilateral action – including an Israeli annexation of parts of the West Bank – that could undermine diplomatic efforts to get Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table. Nickolay Mladenov told the Security Council that all sides must do their part in the coming weeks and months to preserve the prospect of a two-State solution, in line with internationally agreed parameters, international law and UN resolutions. ...

"The fate of the Palestinian and Israeli people must not be determined by destructive unilateral action that cements division and may put peace beyond reach in our lifetime."

He addressed the Council ... just hours after Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas reportedly announced that he is ending "all agreements" with Israel and the United States in response to Israeli plans to annex parts of the West Bank.

His remarks also came three days after a new coalition Government was sworn into office in Israel, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to news reports, determined to declare Israeli sovereignty over Jewish settlements in the occupied territory.

Such a move would dovetail with US President Donald Trump's "Peace to Prosperity" blueprint for the region, which he unveiled in January alongside Mr. Netanyahu - and which the Palestinians have rejected as a denial of their rights. ...

Mr. Mladenov told the 15-member Council that annexation would represent "a most serious violation of international law" and deal a devastating blow to the two-State solution.

It would also slam the door on fresh negotiations and threaten efforts to advance regional and international peace, he said.

The Palestinian reaction to annexation is "a desperate cry for help (and) a call for immediate action" from a generation of Palestinian leaders who have been preparing for

full Statehood since the Oslo Accords signed in Washington, in 1993.

“The Palestinian leadership is not threatening. It is calling for urgent action to preserve the prospect of peace”, said the Special Coordinator ...

“Israel must abandon threats of annexation”, he added, “and the Palestinian leadership must re-engage with all members of the Quartet. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1064522>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Turkey: Religious Freedom

Lord Patten (Conservative) [HL4341] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the religious freedoms of British (1) Jews, and (2) Christians, who are resident in Turkey.

Baroness Sugg: The Turkish constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion, regardless of an individual's citizenship. We regularly discuss these issues and will continue to engage the Turkish Government at all levels to urge respect for Freedom of Religion or Belief, which are essential to the long-term health of Turkish democracy. Defending persecuted Christians, and persecuted individuals of all faiths or beliefs, remains a long-standing priority for the British Government.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-05-12/HL4341/>

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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>

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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