



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Marriage: Coronavirus

Mark Tami (Labour) [72821] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether he plans to extend the period of validity for notices of marriage for weddings unable to take place as a result of the covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

Reply from Alex Chalk: We understand the frustration couples who have had to postpone their wedding or civil partnership must be feeling.

The requirement to solemnize a marriage within twelve months of giving notice to marry is set out in primary legislation, which does not provide for extending this period. It would require primary legislation to change this and we continue to explore potential legislative opportunities. In the meantime, the fees charged by local authorities for giving notice can be reduced, waived or refunded on compassionate grounds or in cases of hardship. It is for each local authority to determine when this can be applied.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-13/72821/>

House of Lords Written Answer

Education: Racial Discrimination

Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-affiliated) [HL6587] To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had, if any, with Universities UK about combating racism in medical schools.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay: Racism is abhorrent and we all have a part to play in combating it, in higher education and more widely.

Universities have a responsibility to ensure they provide a safe and inclusive environment for all staff and students. The government expects institutions to take their responsibilities, including those under the Equality Act (2010), seriously and to have in place appropriate policies and procedures to tackle racism.

The government continues to work with Universities UK (UUK) to support work on implementing its 'Changing the Culture' framework.

UUK has an advisory group to tackle racial harassment in higher education institutions, chaired by Professor David Richardson, and in March announced the appointment of independent external advisers to strengthen the work of this group. My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, wrote to Professor Richardson in April to thank him for his continued work to address racial harassment in higher education and to express her interest in the outcomes of the advisory group's work. In addition, officials at the Department for Education regularly meet UUK to discuss progress on tackling these important issues.

Furthermore, the British Medical Association has guidance, support, and information on discrimination and harassment in the medical profession, which covers racial harassment in medical schools; this is available on their website at

www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/discrimination-and-harassment.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-07-07/HL6587/>

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House of Commons Written Answers

Coronavirus: Israel

Julian Lewis (Independent) [69407] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on that country's development of a passive vaccine treatment for covid-19 using convalescent plasma.

Jo Churchill: Experts at Public Health England have had several conversations with their Israeli counterparts, including on Israeli research into a potential vaccine for COVID-19.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-06/69407/>

The following two questions both received the same answer

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Steve McCabe (Labour) [75190] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with reference to the 2019-20 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between her Department and the Palestinian Authority, what assessment her Department made in 2019-20 of the compliance of the Palestinian Authority with the commitments in that MOU; and what representations her Department has made to the Palestinian Authority on compliance with that MOU.

Steve McCabe (Labour) [75191] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with reference to the 2018-19 Memorandum of Understanding between her Department and the Palestinian Authority, what assessment her Department made in 2018-19 of whether there had been any breach by the Palestinian Authority of the commitments set out in the MoU; and what discussions her Department had with the Authority on the importance of transparency and compliance with those commitments.

James Cleverly: Our partnership with the Palestinian Authority (PA) is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and DFID's 'partnership principles'. We have an active dialogue with the PA on the issues identified through these channels and we assess that the PA continues to demonstrate a credible commitment to our agreements and the 'partnership principles'.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-16/75190/>

and

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2020-07-16/75191/>

The MoU referred to above is not available online.

House of Lords Written Answer

Israeli Settlements

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick (Non-affiliated) [HL6571] To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent representations they have made to the government of Israel about the planned annexation of parts of the West Bank.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As the Minister for the Middle East and North Africa made clear at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 24 June, we are deeply 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. 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. We continue to urge Israel not to take these steps. The Prime Minister has conveyed the UK's opposition to unilateral annexation to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on multiple occasions, including in a phone call on 6 July and a letter in June. The Prime Minister also urged Israel not to proceed in an article in Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth on 1 July. The Foreign Secretary reiterated this message in his calls with Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Gantz and Foreign Minister Ashkenazi.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2020-07-07/HL6571/>

The UK statement to the Security Council referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/urging-a-negotiated-two-state-solution-between-israelis-and-palestinians>

A brief summary of the phonecall referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-pm-netanyahu-6-july-2020>

The article referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/as-israels-friend-i-urge-you-not-to-annex-pm-boris-johnson>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Moving toward peace negotiations in the Middle East:

Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Chargé d'Affaires to the UN, at the Security Council briefing on the Middle East

... I want to say, firstly, we remain deeply concerned about the prospect of annexation. Not only would this be damaging to efforts to restart peace negotiations and contradict international law, it would also compound the already fragile health and humanitarian situation. The priority must be on preventing annexation and finding alternative ways for the parties to engage. And I reiterate that the United Kingdom will not recognise any changes to the 1967 lines except those agreed between both parties.

Ultimately, we want to see both sides make meaningful steps towards a just, fair and

agreed settlement. ... we want to see Israelis and Palestinians return to the negotiating table. And the United Kingdom offers its full support in fostering such dialogue.

Now is the time for Israel to make clear that it will not take any unilateral steps towards annexation. Now is the time for both parties to resume cooperation, particularly in regards to security. And now is the time for the Palestinians to reach out to the United States and to Israel so that we can begin the journey back to negotiations. ...

In instances where there have been accusations of excessive use of force by the Israeli authorities - as appears to be the case in the killing of the Eyad Falak in May - we expect full, transparent investigations. There must be serious reflection on what causes such use of force to be deemed necessary. Meanwhile, we saw a steady increase in indirect fire attacks from Gaza into Israel from late May until early July. This shows the very real and unacceptable intent of militant Palestinian groups towards Israeli civilians. ...

We support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state based on 1967 lines with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states and a just fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees. And the United Kingdom stands ready to support that objective in any way that we can.

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/moving-toward-peace-negotiations-in-the-middle-east>

United Nations

Security Council briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (as delivered by UN Special Coordinator Mladenov)

... Palestinians and Israelis are grappling with a complex and potentially destabilizing three-pronged crisis:

An escalating health crisis as both struggle to contain the rapid spike of COVID-19 cases. A spiraling economic crisis as businesses close, unemployment soars, protests increase, and the economy suffers the financial impact of months of lockdowns and restrictions.

And finally, a mounting political confrontation, driven by the threat of Israeli annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank, and the steps taken in response by the Palestinian leadership. ...

In recent weeks, the region and the broader international community have continued to express their firm rejection of annexation. Among these, on 1 July, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom published an Op-Ed in a leading Israeli newspaper expressing his opposition to annexation and asserting that such a step would violate international law and run "contrary to Israel's own long-term interests." ...

On 2 July, leaders from Fatah and Hamas held a rare joint video press conference, in an effort to restate their opposition to annexation and to commit to a unified Palestinian front against it. ...

The Secretary-General and the United Nations will continue efforts to resuscitate a dialogue among all stakeholders, with no preconditions, and in the interest of peace and a negotiated resolution to the conflict. ...

Regrettably, the situation on the ground is rapidly being affected by the dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel.

To contain the pandemic, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has re-imposed movement restrictions across the West Bank as well as some closures in the worst-hit governorates. Israel has also re-imposed limitations on gatherings and certain non-essential businesses, as well as lockdowns in specific areas. ...

The challenge of confronting the rapid increase in cases in the West Bank and boosting prevention efforts in Gaza has been significantly compounded by the ending of coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. ...

Over the past weeks, because of the unprecedented circumstances, the UN has offered to increase its intermediary role between the parties. ...

During the reporting period, daily violence continued throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. ...

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza organized protests against Israel's plan to annex parts of the West Bank. Overall these protests remained peaceful. On some occasions Israeli Security Forces used rubber-coated bullets and tear gas, declared closed military areas and set up checkpoints near protests. ...

Meanwhile, settlers perpetrated some 13 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in nine injuries and damage to property ...

There were some 25 incidents also in which Palestinians threw stones or Molotov cocktails at Israeli-owned vehicles, injuring seven Israeli civilians, including one child, and causing damage to property.

In Gaza, while the relative calm continued, Palestinian militants fired five rockets towards southern Israel. One fell short inside Gaza, one was intercepted by the Iron Dome system and the others hit in open areas in Israel, causing no injuries or damage. On all occasions, the IDF carried out retaliatory strikes against Hamas targets, including underground infrastructure in the Strip, with no injuries reported. ...

I note that the latest information available from Israeli authorities indicates that, as of 31 May, the number of Palestinian detainees, including minors, in Israeli prisons is at its lowest level in years. ...

On the Golan, while generally calm, the situation remained volatile, with the continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. ...

Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a duty to protect the lives and livelihoods of their populations.

With unemployment in Israel surging to over 20 per cent, and with thousands of Israelis taking to the streets to demand greater financial support from their Government, many have highlighted the staggering financial and, potentially, human cost of moving forward with potential annexation plans.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on the Israeli Government to abandon plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank. ...

For the United Nations, protecting lives will always remain our highest priority. ...

Today, however, it is not enough to restate our opposition to annexation. Today we should discuss what can and must be done to improve the situation on the ground, preserve the prospect for a two-state solution, increase the chances of meaningful negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and protect these efforts from spoilers, radicals and extremists. ...

We must use the opportunity presented by the current crises to move forward, to and to regain the path towards a negotiated two-state solution, built on a just and sustainable resolution to the conflict in line with relevant UN resolutions, bilateral agreements and international law.

To read the full transcript see

<https://unsco.unmissions.org/security-council-briefing-situation-middle-east-including-palestinian-question-delivered-un-0>

The Op-Ed referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/as-israels-friend-i-urge-you-not-to-annex-pm-boris-johnson>

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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>

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

**** closes in 2 days**

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