



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Lords Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Civil Partnerships and Marriage

Baroness Blackstone (Labour Independent) [HL8046] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Baroness Williams of Trafford on 3 August (HL7029) and by Lord Keen of Elie on 4 August (HL7031), what is the timetable for (1) their proposed interim reform of the law governing approved premises for marriages and civil partnerships, (2) the proposed limited reform and non-legislative options relating to religious weddings, and (3) the implementation of the provisions in the Civil Partnership, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc) Act 2019 for the introduction of an electronic system of marriage registration and the update of the marriage entry to include the names of both sets of parents of a couple.

Marriage: Reform

Baroness Blackstone (Labour Independent) [HL8047] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answers by Baroness Williams of Trafford on 3 August (HL7029) and by Lord Keen of Elie on 4 August (HL7031), why they are pursuing reforms of marriage law separately to the ongoing Law Commission review; whether they plan to bring forward legal recognition of humanist marriages before the conclusion of that review; and if not, (1) why not, and (2) what consideration they have given to doing so on an interim basis.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: The Government announced in June 2019 that the Law Commission will conduct a fundamental review of the law on how and where people can legally marry in England and Wales. This is an important and complex social policy reform and requires careful thought and consideration. As part of the review, the Government invited the Law Commission to make recommendations about how marriage by humanist and other non-religious belief organisations could be incorporated into a revised or new scheme for all marriages that is simple, fair and consistent.

The Law Commission has published its consultation paper and the Government, following the final report, will decide on provision on the basis of the Law Commission's recommendations.

In parallel, the Government made clear when it announced the Law Commission project that it would also, as an interim measure, undertake work to allow more civil weddings and civil partnerships to take place outdoors through secondary legislation.

Alongside the Law Commission project, the independent Sharia review recommended an offence apply to religious celebrants marrying in a ceremony that is outside the ambit of the Marriage Acts. Any legislative proposal, including such an offence, must be thoroughly assessed for its fairness to all religious groups and for how far it could achieve the change of practice intended. That is why it is with the greatest care that the Government is continuing the exploration of both limited reform and non-legislative options that it began in detail last year.

On the question of timing the Government will make its intentions clear in due course.

And in regard to the implementation of the provisions in the Civil Partnership, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc) Act 2019, the Home Office is currently working on the secondary legislation, which will need to be debated in Parliament, to enable these changes to be introduced and an implementation date will be announced in due course.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-14/hl8046>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-14/hl8047>

The answers referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-07-20/hl7029>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-07-20/hl7031>

Information about the Law Commission review referred to above can be read at

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/law-commission-begins-work-on-weddings-reform/>

The consultation referred to above can be read at

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

The report of the independent Sharia review, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/678478/6.4152_HO_CPFPG_Report_into_Sharia_Law_in_the_UK_WEB.pdf

The following two questions both received the same answer

Marriage

Baroness Whitaker (Labour) [HL8001] To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to allow commercial wedding celebrants to perform legally recognised marriages without being precluded from carrying on a business of solemnising marriages for the purpose of profit or gain.

Marriage: Humanism

Baroness Whitaker (Labour) [HL8002] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to consider extending legal recognition of humanist marriages since 2013; and what further plans they have to do so.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: Reform to fundamental marriage law in England and Wales needs to be wholesale and not undertaken on a piecemeal basis. That is why we invited the Law Commission last year to review the law on how and where couples may marry. As part of that review, the Law Commission will make recommendations about how marriage by humanists and other non-religious belief organisations could be incorporated into a revised or new scheme for all marriages that is simple, fair and consistent.

The Law Commission's consultation on weddings also considers how the law could

allow independent celebrants to solemnize legal weddings. The Government will decide on provision on the basis of the Law Commission's recommendations. The Law Commission published its consultation paper on 3 September and will welcome contributions from all stakeholders.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-09/hl8001>
and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-09/hl8002>

Information about the Law Commission review referred to above can be read at <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/law-commission-begins-work-on-weddings-reform/>

The consultation referred to above can be read at

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

Welsh Assembly Oral Answer

Update on Local Coronavirus Restrictions

Darren Millar (Conservative): I note that the restrictions on travel in and out of these counties also affect people of faith in a significant way. As I understand it, it's not considered to be a reasonable excuse to travel beyond your local authority border to attend a place of worship of your choice. Now, there are many people of faith who travel across their county borders in order to access services in churches and synagogues of denominations or places of worship of their particular faith. This is not something that I believe is acceptable, and I would urge you, Minister, to look at this again. You've been very considerate of faith communities generally throughout this lockdown, but spiritual well-being is just as important as mental health and physical well-being, and therefore I urge you to look again at that particular restriction to see whether there's some way that that can be addressed.⁴⁶⁸

Minister for Health and Social Services (Vaughan Gething): ... I'll look again at the issue, because we do have regular conversations with faith leaders, but this is about keeping people alive in the first instance and how we then try to keep them well, and these are significant intrusions into how people live their lives. I have recognised that not just today, but on many other occasions. What we want to do is to try to take an approach that balances the harm that we know coronavirus causes and to see how we can suppress the virus to allow a different and a more normal, in these certainly not normal times, way for people to go about living their lives. But the starting point has to be how we keep people alive in the first instance.

<https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/6567#C312814>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answer

Middle East: Peace Negotiations

Jamie Wallis (Conservative) [93688] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect of the Israel-UAE and Israel-Bahrain peace agreements on stability in that region.

James Cleverly: We warmly welcome the agreement between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. This is an 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. The UK is committed to making progress towards a two-state solution and is strongly supportive of a regional approach to peace. We profoundly hope that this moment can be used as a step towards direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-22/93688>

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Welcoming historic agreements and working towards a two-state solution: Statement by Ambassador Jonathan Allen at the Security Council briefing on the situation in the Middle East

... Mr President, the United Kingdom has warmly welcomed the historic steps taken over the last two months, with the normalisation of relations between three great friends of the United Kingdom: Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Israel.

These positive steps are already having an impact, such as direct flights from Israel to the UAE and early commercial agreements. More positive progress will come: trade, cultural and scientific links and much more. We urge others across the region to follow the example of the UAE and Bahrain.

Mr President, we must acknowledge that the agreements represent a profound shift in the region. It is critical that we as the international community build on the momentum of normalisation to take forward resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ...

We urge the Palestinian Authority to resume co-operation with Israel, in the interests of the Palestinian people. We also call on both parties to make constructive and open steps towards a return to dialogue.

Mr President, whilst the threat of annexation appears to have receded, the UK remains concerned by a number of negative trends on the ground. We reiterate our call on both sides to halt any activity that makes peace more difficult to achieve. In accordance with resolution 2334, this includes terrorism, incitement, violence against civilians, demolition of Palestinian property and settlement advancements. ...

We remain concerned at ongoing plans to take forward settlements ... All settlements are illegal under International Law. Settlement construction in these highly sensitive areas would damage prospects for a two-state solution and threaten to further undermine the viability of a future Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem. ...

Israel, like all countries, has a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend its citizens from attack. But in doing this it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties. For example, the shooting and injuring by the Israeli Defence Forces of an unarmed, deaf and mute Palestinian at the Qalandia checkpoint on the 17th of August is deeply concerning. ...

The Palestinian leadership must continue their efforts to tackle terror and incitement, to strengthen institutions and develop a sustainable economy. Hamas and other terrorist groups must permanently end their incitement and rocket fire against Israel. The United Kingdom Government strongly condemns all forms of violence and incitement to violence. We welcome Fatah and Hamas efforts towards reconciliation, and hope that this can lead to the holding of democratic elections across the Occupied Palestinian Territories. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/welcoming-historic-agreements-and-working-towards-a-two-state-solution>

European Union

High Representative/Vice-President Borrell speaks to Palestinian President Abbas

High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell held a phone call with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas ...

Their conversation was an opportunity to exchange views on several important issues, including on the socio-economic situation and the prospect of Palestinian elections. In this context, High Representative Borrell reiterated the EU's continued support to Palestinian state building.

High Representative Borrell and President Abbas also discussed the latest developments related to the Middle East Peace Process. In particular, High Representative Borrell emphasised the EU's continued commitment to a negotiated and viable two-state solution that respects the internationally agreed parameters and international law and underlined the importance of creating the conditions to rebuild trust and resume dialogue among the parties.

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/86153/high-representativevice-president-borrell-speaks-palestinian-president-abbas_en

United Nations

Normalization of Ties between Israel, Gulf Arab States Presents Opportunity for Re-engagement in Talks, Special Coordinator Tells Security Council

... Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General ... noted the recent normalization of relations between Israel and two Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, highlighting the suspension of Israel's plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank. "The Secretary-General hopes that these developments will encourage Palestinian and Israeli leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations towards a two-State solution and will create opportunities for regional cooperation," he said. Citing the recent call by the foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt, France and Germany for restored hope in the peace process and resumed negotiations based on international law and agreed parameters, he said he was also encouraged by recent moves towards strengthening Palestinian unity, as demonstrated by the outcome of the Fatah-Hamas meetings calling for long-awaited national presidential and legislative elections. ...

He said that, although Israel's settlement advancement was limited over the past two reporting periods, he remains concerned about plans for settlement construction in the E1 area and other sensitive locations of the occupied West Bank ...

Given the severe economic and health crisis, the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships must urgently re-engage and strengthen efforts to advance the goal of a negotiated two-State solution, he said, also urging Israel, as the occupying Power, to ensure the safety and security of the Palestinian population. ...

Rodney Hunter (United States) emphasized that the recent agreements brokered by Washington, D.C., to normalize relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain — known collectively as the Abraham Accords — represent the most crucial steps toward peace in the Middle East in many years. ... Recalling that his country's Government has also laid out a broader Middle East peace plan, he said the Abraham Accords build further on that sensible vision. However, despite those positive developments, Palestinian terrorists have continued to fire a barrage of rockets at Israel, he said. ...

Nicolas de Riviere (France) noted that the parameters of a two-State solution are long-standing and well-known ... The recently normalized relations between States in the region can contribute to that goal, he said, emphasizing nevertheless that the aspirations of all parties must be considered. While pledging that France will not compromise Israel's

security nor abandon the Palestinian people and their rights, he stressed: the suspension of Israel's annexation project must become permanent; the policy of settlement must be halted; and resolution 2334 (2016) must be fully implemented. ...

Jonathan Guy Allen (United Kingdom) [*see above under "Foreign and Commonwealth Office"*]

Vassily A. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) noted that ... all final status issues must be resolved by the parties themselves through negotiations at the earliest possible date, he welcomed the recent proposal by President Abbas to set such a process in motion. "Isolated efforts will not lead to any breakthroughs," he said ...

Günter Sautter (Germany) expressed hope that the momentum generated by the recently signed normalization agreements will contribute to the quest for peace and stability in the Middle East. However, a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be based on international law, United Nations resolutions and internationally agreed parameters, he said, emphasizing that "normalization must not result in consolidating the status quo". ... He went on to note that settlement activities are illegal under international law and only serve to undermine peace efforts ... Meanwhile, he cautioned, any changes to the legal and traditional status quo on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and the city of Hebron would further erode signed agreements and trust ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14315.doc.htm>

To UN, Israeli Prime Minister says 'no doubt' more Arab countries will soon join 'circle of peace'

... Mr. Netanyahu said that while the Middle East "is not exactly renowned" for producing good news, the recent agreements between Israel, and Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, respectively, would bring their peoples the "blessings of peace" and the enormous benefits through increased trade, investment and commerce.

The Prime Minister said that he had "no doubt that more Arab and Muslim countries will be joining the circle of peace, soon, very soon." ...

Mr. Netanyahu said that for decades, all progress was halted because of "completely unrealistic Palestinian demands", demands – he said – were "complete non-starters for any responsible Israeli Government."

He also spoke of the President of the United States, who chose a path "anchored in reality", recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and put forward a realistic peace plan that recognizes Israel's right, addresses its security needs and provides the Palestinians with a dignified realistic path forward if they make peace with Israel. ...

Prime Minister Netanyahu also spoke of the threat to his country and other Arab States, posed by Iran. ... Mr. Netanyahu also accused Hezbollah of keeping a "secret arms depot" near Beirut's airport, near Janah, an area with civilian buildings and energy infrastructure, noting that if the depot explodes, "it's another tragedy," ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1074242>

UAE expresses hopes for Middle East peace talks following 'historic' accord with Israel

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan highlighted his country's diplomatic efforts which affirmed rejection of any annexation of Palestinian territory, as well as its staunch support for a two-State solution in the Middle East.

"With the signing of a historic peace accord with Israel, supported by American efforts, my country was able to freeze the annexation decision and opened broad prospects to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region," he said ...

“We hope this peace accord will provide the opportunity for the Palestinians and the Israelis to re-engage in negotiations to achieve peace. Our position towards supporting the Palestinian people and achieving the two-state solution is firm.” ...

The Foreign Minister said solving crises, especially in the Arab region, requires taking what he described as “a unified international position” that rejects violation of state sovereignty and foreign interference in internal affairs, and which seeks UN-led political solutions while also addressing threats posed by terrorist groups such as the Houthis, Da’esh, al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood.

“The tensions in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Iraq and other states are all related to blatant interference in Arab affairs made by states that incite strife and discord, or that have historical delusions of restoring their domination and colonial rule over the Arab region and the Horn of Africa. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1074142>

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Human Rights Council holds separate general debates on the universal periodic review, and on the situation of human rights in Palestine and other occupied arab territories

... Israel was not in the room and did not take the floor as a concerned country.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, said that by exploiting the international community’s preoccupation with the COVID-19 pandemic, the occupying power continued its attacks against civilians, targeting children, health workers, women and older persons, restraining freedom of movement, cutting down trees and restricting fishing, as well as the blockade of Gaza. The funds of the Palestinian Authority were being confiscated. Thousands of Palestinians were in jails in Israel. Thousands of Palestinians were dying because there was no healthcare available. There was collective punishment. There were 66 bodies of Palestinians that were kept in cold rooms by Israel, in violation of international laws ; they should be released and given back to the families. Five thousand new settlements had been built, including close to east Jerusalem, to remove territorial continuity between the north and the south of the West Bank. Criticizing the plan touted by the United States, the State of Palestine said the annexation it provided for was a violation of international law and the right to self-determination, preventing the establishment of two States. The international community should not cede American diktats, and must boycott products coming from the occupied territories.

Syria said the occupying power continued its occupation of the Syrian Golan in violation of Security Council resolutions, pursuing actions against Syrian citizens and violating their right to work, health, property, and freedom of movement. Natural resources were being pillaged, which facilitated the construction of settlements, which, in turn, furthered human rights violations. The occupying power continued to discriminate against Syrians in the Syrian Golan. This made the situation of Syrian citizens more precarious, as they faced expropriation of their agricultural lands. ... Syria condemned the perpetuation of the occupation and the expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan as well as the attempts to change the demographics and legal status of the occupied territories. The settlers must stop their barbaric practices.

Speakers said those who spoke of peace and coexistence could not continue to ignore the illegal actions that only perpetuated violence and suffering in the occupied territories. The blockade had forced people in Gaza to live in deplorable conditions, which showed that Israel was more interested in continuing its occupation than pursuing peace. ... They said that the detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, and all other forms of

collective punishment targeting the Palestinian people must end. ... The plan put forward by the current United States administration was abominable, and posed a threat to the fundamentals of international law. Others said they had normalized their relations with Israel through an agreement that sought to foster security, peace and tolerance in the region. ... Some speakers said that the Council was still stuck in the past ... perpetuating and entrenching animosities from a forgone era. The double standards that the Council applied to Israel, by singling out just one of the 193 United Nations Member States, not only flouted the universality of the application of human rights, but also, enabled anti-Semitism.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26320&LangID=E>

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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