



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### Westminster Hall Debate

#### Online Harms

*col 149WH Holly Lynch (Labour):* ... During lockdown, we have seen how the internet has facilitated digital connection and social media has provided a lifeline to the outside world for so many. ... however, as lawmakers, we are all collectively responsible for the utter failure to regulate it and for the societal damage that that is causing.

The online harms White Paper published last year confirms that nearly nine in 10 UK adults and 99% of 12 to 15-year-olds are online. The NSPCC estimates that in the first three months of 2020, online sex crimes recorded against children surpassed 100 a day—that is roughly one every 14 minutes. ...

*col 150WH* We talk a great deal about public health right now, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) said ... we will look back on this period in history with disbelief and shame that we did nothing in the face of what can only be described as a public health ticking time bomb. ...

*col 154WH Andrew Percy (Conservative):* ... I will primarily focus on antisemitism online, particularly in my role as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on antisemitism. ... We all know the history of the rise of antisemitism in recent years, both on the far left and on the far right in this country, and across Europe and the wider world. It is sad that antisemitism has continued to grow and to find space online during this period of coronavirus. We have seen a fall in the number of physical incidents, probably because of the lockdown, but sadly we have seen all too much of a continuation online. Between the start of this year and June the Community Security Trust recorded 344 online incidents. There would have been many more were it not for the narrow reporting parameters. We could easily be up into the millions if we could measure antisemitism under the broadest scope. Those examples are as shocking as what we all know. There are many Members present who are members of the all-party parliamentary group on antisemitism and who have taken a stand on the issue.

*col 155WH* During the period in question there has been Zoombombing of Jewish events with vile racist antisemitic commentary. Sadly, there have been covid conspiracy theories growing online. It is disappointing, first, that there is an anti-mask movement—sadly that is across the world; but often that moves closely to antisemitism. A constituent recently

contacted me about that, with some barking mad idea about masks and how terrible they are, to which I replied, “Next thing you will be telling me it is all the fault of the Rothschilds,” to which—no word of a lie—I received a response saying “Actually, the Rothschilds knew this was going to happen.” That is how this stuff spreads. It is a simple step from one to the other.

**Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op):** ... Does he share my disgust, and is he appalled, that YouTube at the start of this debate is providing links to a notorious antisemitic radio station called Radio Aryan and, indeed, a whole channel dedicated to antisemitic material? I will not read the name out. The content is there right now, as we are having this debate. YouTube has not removed it.

**Andrew Percy:** It is absolutely shocking. ...

Then of course there was the shocking Wiley incident, when he was tweeting on average every 87 seconds, which is incredible. There were 600 tweets, on a conservative estimate, which were seen online by more than 47 million people, of vile antisemitic abuse. Let us just consider some examples of it. He tweeted:

“If you work for a company owned by 2 Jewish men and you challenge the Jewish community in anyway of course you will get fired.”

Another one was:

“Infact there are 2 sets of people who nobody has really wanted to challenge #Jewish & #KKK but being in business for 20 years you start to undestand why:”

Then—something completely disgusting:

“Jewish people you think you are too important I am sick of you”

and

“Jewish people you make me sick and I will not budge”.

It took days. ... When one platform closed it down it ended up elsewhere. That is despite all the terms and conditions in place. ...

*col 156WH* There is a similar problem with other platforms. I want to talk briefly about BitChute. It is an alternative platform, but we see the same old tropes there. ... videos in the name of the proscribed group National Action, a channel, for example, with the name “Good Night Jewish Parasite”, livestreaming of terrorist content, racist videos about Black Lives Matter protesters and much more; but it is a UK-based platform with UK directors, and while action is taken against individual videos there is, sadly, not enough recourse. ...

*col 158WH* **Fiona Bruce (Conservative):** ... The indications were that that Bill would be ready for pre-legislative scrutiny in early 2020. I am more than saddened that that was not the case. The Government produced an online harms White Paper and a consultation in April 2019. The consultation closed in June 2019; the Government’s full response to it is still awaited, with no draft Bill yet in sight.

We have heard that the draft Bill might now be published in mid-2021, meaning that, subject to pre-legislative scrutiny, it could be 2023 before it is on the statute book ...

*col 161WH* **Maria Miller (Conservative):** ... The core concept that the Government want to put forward—as we understand it, anyway—is a duty of care: to make companies take responsibility for the safety of their users and to tackle the harm caused by their content, their activities and their services. Those are basic things that one would think were already in place, but they are not. They are to be applauded as a starting point, but again let us be clear that it is only a starting point, because setting up a regulator and regulatory frameworks do not provide a route of redress for victims. ...

People can bring a claim through ordinary legal proceedings, but that is limited by the existing legal framework, which we know is inadequate. The Law Commission is belatedly looking at a number of these areas, but it feels like the horse has already bolted. ...

We also need to deal with the inadequacies of the legislation, and I suggest that the Government should focus on at least three areas. When it comes to image-based abuse, the law is a mess. We have layer upon layer of legislation that does not give the police the

necessary tools to protect victims. The second area is age verification ... The third area is the importance of putting in place legislation that protects victims of intimidation during elections ...

**col 163WH Stephen Doughty:** ... I have seen online videos glamorising drugs gangs and violence not removed due to claims of freedom of expression. These were videos that showed young people dripping in blood disposing of evidence after stabbing somebody—a simulated event, but one that was clearly glorifying utterly unacceptable and disgusting behaviour. I have seen jihadi organisations recruiting and spreading their messages of terror, including proscribed organisations, and other obvious ones such as Radio Aryan given the freedom to operate and spread their message of hate by YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and others, not taken off. I have seen online attacks on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and attacks on the LGBT+ community. I have had my own experience of such online attacks, including threats about real-world events, and having to deal with those through the police.

**col 164WH** This problem has got to be dealt with. We cannot see any more delay from the Government, either in banning these organisations or bringing forward online harms legislation. We cannot wait until 2023 ...

**col 172WH The Minister for Digital and Culture (Caroline Dinenage):** ... the Government published the online harms White Paper last year, setting out how to make legislation to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online. ... The intention to establish a new duty of care for companies towards their users will ensure they have appropriate systems and processes in place to deal with the harmful content on their services and to keep their users safe.

Our approach will require companies to have clear and accessible mechanisms for users to report harmful content and to challenge it—take it down, in fact—where necessary. Companies will be expected to enforce their terms and conditions transparently and consistently. The duty of care will be overseen by a regulator, which will have oversight of these mechanisms and strong enforcement powers to deal with non-compliance. ...

We intend to publish the full Government response within the next few weeks and to have the legislation ready early next year. ...

**col 174WH** We are clear that what is illegal offline should be illegal online ... We need to make sure that social media companies take as much responsibility as they can, but we also need to make sure that law enforcement agencies are equipped to take action where they need to. In some cases, the law is not fit for purpose to deal with the challenges of the online world ... That is why we instructed the Law Commission to review existing legislation on abusive and harmful communications. It is also undertaking additional reviews, including on the taking, making and sharing of intimate images, which is obviously incredibly upsetting for victims. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-10-07/debates/E70A853B-6CBE-4215-9035-30AB3E490798/OnlineHarms>

*The White Paper referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper>

*and an initial government response can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/public-feedback/online-harms-white-paper-initial-consultation-response>

## Scottish Government

### Hate crime: Report it to stop it

A campaign which urges Scots who witness hate crime to 'report it to stop it' is relaunched

today ahead of Hate Crime Awareness Week.

The initiative features a series of letters from Scotland - addressed to perpetrators of hate crime - describing the impact it has on its victims, stating that 'your hate has no home here'. ...

Communities Secretary Aileen Campbell said "The Scottish Government takes all forms of hate crime seriously. It negatively impacts on individuals and communities so we must all play our part to challenge hate crime and help shape the inclusive and respectful society we all wish to live in. If you experience or witness a hate crime, whether it's physical or verbal, online or in the streets, please report it. ..."

Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf said: "There were over 5,200 hate crimes reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal last year. But we know that many incidents go unreported.

"The law should protect vulnerable groups and minorities which is why we brought forward the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill.

"The Bill, which is currently before parliament, will increase confidence in policing among those communities affected by hate crime, by making it clear to victims, perpetrators, communities and to wider society that offences motivated by prejudice are completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated."

Police Scotland Assistant Chief Constable Gary Ritchie said: "Hate crime can have a lasting impact on individuals, families and communities. Scotland isn't the kind of country that will tolerate those who seek to target and abuse people based on their disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender/transgender identity and Police Scotland will take strong action against anyone who acts in that way. ..."

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.scot/news/hate-crime-report-it-to-stop-it/>

*Resources related to the above campaign can be accessed from*

<https://onescotland.org/campaigns/hate-crime-campaign/>

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## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

#### **Arab States: Israel**

**Matthew Offord (Conservative)** [97552] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the number of Arab League countries that have recently normalised relations with Israel.

**James Cleverly:** We warmly welcome the normalising of relations, and the strengthening of ties between Israel and its neighbours. We urge others across the region to follow the example of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The changing regional context and converging Arab and Israeli interests present an opening to develop relations and create the conditions for serious Israeli-Palestinian talks to resume. 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/2020-09-30/97552>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **West Bank: Demolition**

**Paul Blomfield (Labour)** [96862] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign,

Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps he is taking to tackle Israel's demolition of structures in the West Bank and resulting displacement of Palestinians during the covid-19 pandemic.

**Paul Blomfield (Labour)** [96863] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies in the context of the covid-19 pandemic of reports of Israel's demolition of water, sanitation and hygiene structures used by Palestinians in the West Bank.

**James Cleverly:** The UK is seriously concerned by the continued demolitions of Palestinian structures by Israeli authorities, particularly at this time. In all but the most exceptional of circumstances demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The practice causes unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians, is harmful to the peace process and weakens the capacity of Palestinians to withstand the impact of COVID-19. Under IHL, an occupying power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining public health and hygiene in the occupied territory to the fullest extent of the means available to it and with the cooperation of the local authorities. We call on both parties to avoid any provocative action which might undermine the cooperation that is so critical.

Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv have repeatedly raised our concerns about demolitions with Israeli Ministers and senior officials, and urged them to cease the counter-productive policy of demolitions, and provide a clear, transparent route to construction for Palestinians in Area C. The British Government also supports Palestinians facing demolition or eviction in Area C of the West Bank through our legal aid programme. This helps residents challenge decisions in the Israeli legal system.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-29/96862>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-29/96863>

#### **Palestinians: Children**

**Paul Blomfield (Labour)** [96864] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the reported continued prevalence of night time family home arrests of Palestinian children by Israeli soldiers.

**James Cleverly:** We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law. We remain concerned about Israel's extensive use of administrative detention which, according to international law, should be used only when security makes this absolutely necessary rather than as routine practice and as a preventive rather than a punitive measure.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-29/96864>

#### **Palestinians: Children**

**Paul Blomfield (Labour)** [96865] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will make representations to his Israeli counterpart on those Palestinian children who have been held in Israeli military detention since the end of June 2020.

**James Cleverly:** The UK remains concerned about the treatment of Palestinian children detained in Israeli military detention. We are committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to the practices surrounding children in detention. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including on this issue. We also continue to fund projects providing legal aid to minors and capacity building to local lawyers.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-29/96865>

## Lebanon: Weapons

**Craig Tracey (Conservative)** [97648] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on allegations that Hezbollah is producing and storing weapons next to crowded civilian areas in Beirut.

**James Cleverly:** We have long been concerned by Hizballah's stockpiling of weapons within Lebanon, in contravention of relevant UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs). We regularly raise this at the UN Security Council, and we call on the Lebanese authorities to abide by provisions of the relevant UNSCRs. Hizballah's destabilising influence only endangers Lebanon and its people.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-30/97648>

## House of Lords Written Answer

### Gaza: Water

**Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated)** [HL8340] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 16 September (HL7733), what assessment they have made of the impact of bombing by the Israel Defence Forces on (1) the construction of pipelines and reservoirs, and (2) any other infrastructure projects, funded by international projects in Gaza.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We have not made an assessment of this. The UK fully supports Israel's right to self-defence and to defend its citizens from acts of terror. In doing so, it is vital that all actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and are calibrated to avoid civilian casualties. To address water shortages the UK is funding the construction of pipelines and reservoirs that will carry water from the planned Gaza Central Desalination Plant to households across the strip.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-21/hl8340>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-02/hl7733>

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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

**\*\* Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Specified Type B Procedures) (Scotland) Regulations**  
(closing date 20 November 2020)

<https://consult.gov.scot/population-health/consultation-specified-type-b-procedures/>

**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