



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answers

Internet: Safety

Catherine McKinnell (Labour) [96066] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many times (a) he and (b) his officials have met with representatives of groups working to tackle online harms in respect of (i) anti-black racism, (ii) anti-Muslim hatred, (iii) antisemitism, (iv) homophobia, (v) child sexual exploitation and abuse and (f) terrorism in the last three months; and if he will make a statement.

Victoria Atkins: Across Government, we regularly engage with civil society representatives to understand the online threat communities face and to help inform our efforts to tackle online harms. We are clear that what is unacceptable offline should be unacceptable online.

Within the Home Office, we work closely with our international partners and engage with industry colleagues to discuss how platforms can best safeguard their users from terrorism, while also encouraging tech companies work together as one coordinated body through the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), to reduce the availability of terrorist content online. We are also working with civil society partners and social media platforms to encourage victim reporting of online hate crime, including hateful online abuse related to Covid-19.

Home Office officials also meet a range of stakeholders regularly to discuss the online child sexual exploitation and abuse threat and what can and is being done to tackle it. This includes technology companies, non-governmental organisations and other government partners. We have recently been engaging with relevant organisations on the Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and the government's online harms agenda.

The Government does not routinely comment on Ministerial meetings which are held as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-28/96066>

Crown Prosecution Service

Proportion of hate crime cases getting increased sentences at all time high

... In convicted cases where the prosecution applied to the court for a sentence increase to take account of the hate aspect of the crime it was granted in 77.5 per cent of cases, compared to 73.6 per cent last year. In 2007/08 it was just 2.3 per cent.

Max Hill QC, the Director of Public Prosecutions, said: "All crime has a terrible impact on victims but hate crime is especially nasty because it targets people for who they are. It has no place in today's Britain. ...

"As prosecutors we will take cases to court and apply for higher sentences to take account of the hostility that drove offenders. It won't undo the harm done but victims can be reassured that the justice system is working as it should."

The figures also show that in the 12 months to March, the CPS prosecuted 10,950 hate crime cases in England and Wales. The conviction rate was more than 85 per cent or 9,340 cases.

Figures for year ending in March 2020 by hate crime type, England and Wales

	Race	Religion	Sexual Orientation	Transgender	Disability	Total
Prosecutions	8,532	453	1,514	91	360	10,950
Convictions	7,268	384	1,327	69	292	9,340
% convicted	85.2	84.8	87.6	75.8	81.1	85.3

To read the full press release see

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/proportion-hate-crime-cases-getting-increased-sentences-all-time-high>

Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

John Mason (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill will give increased protection to people of any religion. (S5O-04675)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): My view is that, yes, it will.

The bill creates new offences relating to stirring up religious hatred. We know that behaviour that stirs up hatred is corrosive and it can leave entire communities feeling isolated and vulnerable to attack. The bill extends protection to people of any religion from those who seek to stir up hatred against religious groups.

As per my statement on 23 September, I will amend the threshold of the bill's new stirring-up offences, so that they are committed only where the accused intends to stir up hatred.

It should also be said that, of course, we have freedom of expression sections in the bill, one of which refers to the right to religious practice and expression of faith. I hope that that gives reassurance to religious groups.

John Mason: Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is a bit ironic that some religious groups oppose the bill because they think that they will lose some of their freedom of expression, whereas in fact the bill will give extra protection to people with a religious background?

Humza Yousaf: I simply say this to those groups. I know that the concerns that they express are genuine and I will engage with them. There are concerns around, for example, the section in the bill on the possession of inflammatory material. Again, I hope that my earlier statement to the chamber on moving the threshold of the stirring-up offences to apply only where there is intent would help to calm and

mitigate many of the fears that some have expressed.

I will continue to engage with religious groups and other stakeholders throughout the bill process, just as I have done from the very beginning.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12883&i=116460#ScotParlOR>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12839&i=116077#ScotParlOR>

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

Richard Lyle (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government for what reason part 2 of its hate crime bill does not require the consent of the Lord Advocate before proceedings for stirring up offences may be instituted, when similar sections of the Public Order Act 1986 and Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 require the consent of the attorney general or director of public prosecutions, and whether it will amend part 2 to include this safeguard. (S5O-04677)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): In Scotland, all public prosecutions are brought by prosecutors within the system of prosecution for which the Lord Advocate is responsible. It is a matter for the Lord Advocate, as head of that system, and acting independently of any other person, to prescribe prosecution policy and to issue such directions as the Lord Advocate considers appropriate in relation to prosecution of any particular offence or category of offences.

In England and Wales, many public bodies in addition to the Crown Prosecution Service prosecute crime. As a result, there are a number of criminal offences for which, as a legislative safeguard, the Attorney General's consent is required before a prosecution can commence.

The distinction between the jurisdictions is routinely recognised in the drafting of offences. For example, the Public Order Act 1986 does not include provision requiring the Lord Advocate's consent to prosecute the current Scottish offence of stirring up racial hatred.

Richard Lyle: The Scottish Government recently outlined a significant change to the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill by clarifying that intent would be required for the offence of stirring up hatred to be committed.

I welcome that change, which will provide much-needed clarity and will reduce the possibility of the freedoms of speech and of expression being undermined. However, as far as I can tell, the issue that I have raised today has not been discussed. It is important that it be discussed and addressed at the earliest possible stage. ...

Will the Cabinet Secretary for Justice rectify that omission? If he will do so, I will then be happy to support the bill.

Humza Yousaf: I do not agree with Mr Lyle's characterisation of that as an "omission". As I have explained, there is no requirement to obtain the Lord Advocate's consent before a prosecution, because all public prosecutions in Scotland are brought by prosecutors within the system of prosecution for which the Lord Advocate is responsible, independent of the Scottish ministers.

That is in contrast with the position in other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom, in which, as I have said, prosecutions can be brought by many other bodies. That being the case, providing that prosecution of certain offences requires the consent of the Attorney General ensures appropriate oversight of those other bodies. That is not the case in Scotland, so I suggest to Mr Lyle that the provision that he seeks is not required.

Liam Kerr (Conservative): The bill has provoked unprecedented responses from fundamentally different sections of Scottish society and, as more and more views are

published, it is clear that the majority of passionately voiced opposition is to the stirring up hatred offences in part 2. Does the cabinet secretary concede that, by not even considering removal and reconsideration of part 2, he is ignoring public opinion and, ultimately, that he risks undermining the important purposes that underlie the bill?

Humza Yousaf: I think that Liam Kerr ultimately undermines the decision of the Parliament by suggesting that.

When he secured a debate on the issue, using his Opposition debating time to do so, the motion was to scrap the bill in its entirety. As we know now from press reports of his leaked emails, that was not his preferred strategy, but was, nonetheless, the strategy that he proposed to the Parliament. It was roundly rejected, so I suggest that Liam Kerr put the victims at the heart of his considerations, rather than politicking around this important issue.

If he were to do that, he might well listen to the victims who say that the stirring up hatred offences being extended to them is hugely important. He has every opportunity in the parliamentary process—I am due in front of the Justice Committee later this month—to create and lodge amendments, if he wishes to strike out entire sections of the bill. We have a parliamentary process, so let us engage in it, but my plea to Liam Kerr is that he think about the victims in all this.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12883&i=116462#ScotParlOR>

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Israel

House of Commons Oral Answers

Israel

Alexander Stafford (Conservative): What discussions she has had with her Israeli counterpart on UK support for expanding Israel's commercial ties with the Gulf states. [907231]

John Howell (Conservative): What steps she is taking to strengthen the UK's trade relationship with Israel. [907232]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Ranil Jayawardena): Britain's trading relationships are already strong in the middle east. In the year ending March 2020, we had bilateral trade of £43.7 billion with the Gulf Co-operation Council countries and £5.1 billion with Israel. I know that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming the Prime Minister's appointment of Lord Austin—former Labour MP for Dudley North—as trade envoy to Israel. As Britain has now taken back control of her trade policy, I can confirm that we are now able to start scoping and probing for talks for a new higher-ambition trade agreement with Israel. We have already launched a joint trade and investment review with the GCC, taking us on the next leg of the journey to free trade with its members.

Alexander Stafford: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Lord Austin, who is a balanced and fair parliamentarian, on his great role, and we look forward to his work there. Given our strong and very positive relationships both with Israel and the Gulf states, the UK has a key role in striking deals. Will he update the House on what further plans we have for striking deals with these countries, as this will not only be good for UK exports but for our international relations as well?

Ranil Jayawardena: My hon. Friend is right. I am delighted that the United Kingdom-Israel trade and partnership agreement was one of the first agreements to be signed by the Department, and relations will be enhanced as we further

deepen our work with Israel. As I mentioned, we have recently launched the United Kingdom GCC JTIR—joint trade and investment review—which will facilitate agreements with our friends there to broaden our trade relationships and realise new opportunities in areas such as education, healthcare, and food and drink. Recently my Department's lobbying secured an improvement in the United Arab Emirates' labelling rules, which has allowed businesses such as sports nutrition start-up Grenade in Solihull to continue to grow in the market. I look forward to securing many more opportunities for businesses across the country.

John Howell: It is unsurprising that Israel is one of the first countries to sign a post-Brexit trade agreement with the UK because bilateral relations are, as the Minister says, very strong. What progress is being made in expanding those opportunities, and how do they go beyond the agreements that have already been signed by the UK?

Ranil Jayawardena: My hon. Friend is right to be very ambitious for Britain's future as we unleash the potential of every corner of our country. I was very pleased to see that last year this growth included new export wins totalling £1 million in his constituency. He is a great champion of exports and he is right that there is more that we can do. There are exciting opportunities in sectors such as financial services, infrastructure and technology. We are working with Israeli counterparts to realise those, including through reinstating plans to host an Anglo-Israeli trade and investment conference in London.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-10-08/debates/D5965898-D63B-4838-8571-B51A97CF008F/Israel>

Topical Questions: International Trade

Chris Green (Conservative): Just as Israel has signed a peace treaty with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, it is innovating to create an instant covid-19 test that is currently being trialled at European airports. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to work with innovative Israeli companies in that area?

Elizabeth Truss: I congratulate Lord Austin on becoming the new trade envoy to Israel. I am delighted to see the reaction on the Labour Benches—they are obviously very pleased with that appointment. We have already signed a continuity FTA with Israel, and we want to go further in a new free trade agreement in areas such as tech, digital and data. We are two tech superpowers, and there is huge opportunity for British businesses and Israeli businesses to work more closely together.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-10-08/debates/EEB2FC13-8DD7-4860-8480-1ADB459D99C4/TopicalQuestions#contribution-FD3C100A-8D36-4523-B808-4E86E7795ACE>

Topical Questions: International Trade

Beth Winter (Labour): In response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, the UK has been at the forefront of EU sanction action against Russia, which this Government have reiterated their support for in two written statements to the House this year. Does the Secretary of State accept an obligation to operate the same principles in relation to trade with the illegal Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories? [907203]

Greg Hands: Sanctions are a matter for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and I will pass on the hon. Member's views to it. However, to answer the first part of her question, the UK has been absolutely robust in its approach to Russia on many fronts, not least the illegal annexation of Ukraine, which we have opposed at all points. We will continue to highlight that injustice at every international forum available.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-10-08/debates/EEB2FC13-8DD7-4860-8480-1ADB459D99C4/TopicalQuestions#contribution-F99261F1-0C55-4462-8C27-AC5E041B2F5D>

House of Commons Written Answer

Hamas

Simon Fell (Conservative) [88394] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment the Government has made of whether Hamas is a unified organisation under a single leadership.

James Brokenshire: The Government does not routinely comment on intelligence matters.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-10/88394>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Iran: UN Arms Embargo

Viscount Waverly (Crossbench): My Lords, a stated foreign policy priority of a Biden presidency is Iran—and rightly so. Should that become a reality, will the Government call for an urgent gathering in Washington of JCPOA E3 participants—including, perhaps, Iran—to put the whole sorry mess back on track, and take that opportunity to press the importance of Israel recognition, and Saudi and Yemen processes?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, we continue to press for progress on the JCPOA and we await the outcome of the US election.

Lord Howell of Guildford (Conservative): My Lords, as it is pretty obvious from the exchanges of the past few minutes that on Iran we are not really on the same page as the Americans, is it not time for a complete rethink of our own Iran policy, making much more use of our old friends and connections in the region, such as Oman and the United Arab Emirates? Would it not be a good starting point to take this into the integrated review of foreign policy and security which, I understand, has just been reactivated—albeit with rather a low profile—and is currently being orchestrated from the Cabinet Office?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: My Lords, on my noble friend's latter point, the integrated review is under way and the outcome will, I am sure, be debated in your Lordships' House in due course. On his earlier point about our policy on Iran, and that of our partners, it is right for us to continue working with our E3 partners, but we also need to work with the United States to achieve a desired outcome that brings peace and stability to the region. In that connection, I participated recently in a UN event, initiated by the UAE and involving Bahrain and Israel, where Israel was recognised by another two countries of the region. These are important steps forward. Israel is a reality and part and parcel of the Middle East. All the countries in the region and beyond need to recognise its status and work together to ensure peace in what has been a troubled region for far too long.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-10-08/debates/87C1308E-FEB4-4D61-A8CE-88E5AB4ED586/IranUNArmsEmbargo#contribution-A49CF106-AC6C-47FC-9702-8F1929935C34>

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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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