Political Affairs Digest
A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents
Home Affairs Relevant Legislation
Israel Consultations

Home Affairs

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House
col 1007 Valerie Vaz (Labour): … I want to wish everyone in the Jewish community a happy Hanukkah, as they light the first Hanukkah candle.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (Conservative): May I join the right hon. Lady in wishing members of the Jewish community a happy Hanukkah? Lighting candles is something done very often in the Catholic Church as well, as she will know. Lighting candles is a very good religious symbol. …
col 1011 Ian Mearns (Labour): … I live in the midst of and represent a large Orthodox Jewish community here in Gateshead, so I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House, and of the Leader of the House, in wishing the whole community that I represent a very happy Hanukkah. …
col 1020 Bob Blackman (Conservative): … I join others in wishing my Jewish constituents chag urim sameach. …

To read the full transcript see
https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-12-10/debates/A0D5EB3C-E00C-42CF-BBEC-0D5CAD8AEE28/BusinessOfTheHouse

Business of the House
Siobhain McDonagh (Labour): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s engagement with faith groups? The Department’s faith engagement review closes tomorrow night, but ironically and shockingly, it quietly removed Ahmadi Muslims from the list of Muslim denominations after angry representations from radical groups such as Khatme Nubuwwat. Given that His Holiness the head of the Ahmadi faith and thousands of Ahmadis have sought asylum, support and safety in the UK because of precisely this sort of persecution in Pakistan, is it not shocking that a Department of the British Government would seem to act in a similar way?

Jacob Rees-Mogg: … The point the hon. Lady raises on the Ahmadis is deeply concerning, and I assure her that I will take it up with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It should not be for other groups to decide
which groups are listed. It should be for the groups themselves to determine whether they are identified as specific groups.

https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-12-10/debates/A0D5EB3C-E00C-42CF-BBEC-0D5CAD8AEE28/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-FDA6615B-0B6F-45D4-BDA2-0915E6A5945E

House of Commons Written Answers

Coronavirus: Weddings

Alberto Costa (Conservative) [122773] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the present capacity limits in place for weddings in Tiers 1 and 2 of the proposed local lockdown restrictions; and whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of increasing these capacity limits in line with relaxed restrictions in areas located in Tiers 1 and 2.

Nadine Dorries: The Government are committed to publishing data that has informed its decision making, including the tier allocations. The Department publishes a weekly watchlist giving epidemiological COVID-19 data for each lower-tier local authority in England. This is available at the following link:
Detailed data on hospital activity can be found at the following link:
The public dashboard on the progress of the virus across a range of metrics is updated daily at the following link:
https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk
The Contain framework sets out how national and local partners work with the public at a local level to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks, this includes the allocation of areas to the appropriate tier, which is available at the following link:
Epidemiological data and projection models on local restriction tiers, including commentary on individual tier allocation decisions is available at the following link:
This provides further information and context beyond the headline metrics as to why areas are in particular tiers currently.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-30/122773

Islam: Religious Hatred

Apsana Begum (Labour) [124889] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what assessment his Department has made of trends in Islamophobic hate crime since 2016.

Luke Hall: The Government engages with Muslim communities in order to tackle hatred against them, this includes understanding issues and trends that drive hate crime. The Government publishes an annual hate crime statistical bulletin which shows the number of hate crimes recorded by the Police that are perceived to have an anti-Muslim motivation. In 2017-18 there were 2965 reports, in 2018-19 there were 3530 reports and in 2019-20 there were 3089 reports.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-03/124889

The following three questions all received the same answer

Islam: Religious Hatred

Apsana Begum (Labour) [124892] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to tackle the level of Islamophobic hate crime in England and Wales.

Religious Hatred: Islam

Apsana Begum (Labour) [124890] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to tackle Islamophobia.

Apsana Begum (Labour) [124899] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what recent steps his Department has taken to tackle Islamophobia in (a) Tower Hamlets, (b) London and (c) England.

Luke Hall: This Government has pledged to tackle prejudice, racism and discrimination. We already have some of the strongest legislation in the world to tackle hate crime and, where groups incite racial hatred or are engaged in racially or religiously motivated criminal activity, we would expect them to be prosecuted. This Government’s work to tackle the scourge of anti-Muslim hatred is extensive, and includes:

- supporting Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) with more than £2.8 million since 2016, helping to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred;
- providing almost £5 million through our Places of Worship Security Grant in the last two years alone - helping to secure and protect mosques and other places of worship

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-03/124892 and https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-03/124890 and https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-03/124899

Social Media: Bullying

Apsana Begum (Labour) [124893] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps his Department is taking to reduce Islamophobic bullying and harassment on social media.

Luke Hall: Muslims in our country should be able to practise their faith in freedom. We have some of the strongest legislation in the world to tackle hate crime and, where groups incite racial hatred or are engaged in racially or religiously motivated criminal activity, we would expect them to be prosecuted. To strengthen this, we are working on the Online Harms policy. The online harms policy is focused on making the UK the safest place in the world to be online. Our approach to tackling online harms will support more users to participate in online discussions, by reducing the risk of bullying or being attacked on the basis of their identity (for example their gender, race, disability, sexuality, religion or age).

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-03/124893
Downing Street

Chanukah Message from the Prime Minister
Our battle with Coronavirus may constrain the normal festivities, but nothing will diminish this celebration of Jewish identity and our pride in the contribution of the Jewish community to our country, which has shone so brightly once again throughout the pandemic. To Jewish people across our United Kingdom and all around the world - Chanukah Sameach!
https://www.facebook.com/borisjohnson/photos/a.238842266316/10158004112781317/

Scottish Government

Chanukah Message from the First Minister (video)
https://twitter.com/scotgov/status/1337126625020928004

Welsh Government

Updated guidance on funerals: COVID 19

House of Lords Debate

International Human Rights Day

col 1330 Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative): On 2 December, the UN General Assembly once again neglected the human rights repression by serial abusers such as Iran, China and Russia and devoted an entire session to deriding Israel. The five resolutions voted on in that session are yet more distractions from tragedies unfolding in many countries but, unlike Canada and our other allies, the UK voted against only one of them. Does the Minister agree that it is time for the UK to stand up not just against item 7 but against oppressive regimes by introducing resolutions that condemn human rights abuses?

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: I totally agree with my noble friend that we need to consider and show leadership on resolutions against repressive regimes. He is right to raise the issue of the Human Rights Council and item 7. We have seen an incremental change and I feel very strongly on a personal level that resolutions, particularly those of a technical nature, need to be looked at. This is not just about creating bureaucracy; it is about creating effective change on the ground. We must hold regimes, wherever they are in the world, that are repressive towards human rights to account and make sure that the perpetrators of crimes are brought to justice. …
https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2020-12-10/debates/DC28177F-CBD6-4CC3-9C8B-831BEBB5F0D1//InternationalHumanRightsDay#contribution-CBBCBDE2-BD07-4367-8A6A-C13F2834608A
House of Commons Written Answer

Palestinians: Refugees

Afzal Khan (Labour) [126127] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on Palestinian refugees of the Government's decision to reduce Official Development Assistance.

James Cleverly: FCDO is currently running a prioritisation exercise across all its programmes, to ensure that every pound we spend goes as far as possible and makes a world-leading difference. We are in the process of assessing the impact of this decision on the UK’s aid expenditure.

The UK is a long-term supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which provides protection and core services to Palestinian refugees across the region. We have consistently been a top donor to UNRWA, providing £51 million in 2020. In his statement to the House of Commons on 26 November, the Foreign Secretary stated that alleviating humanitarian crises will be a focus area for ODA.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-07/126127

The statement referred to above can be read at https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-11-26/debates/A2442925-0DA2-4262-B564-1C6FEE24881A/OfficialDevelopmentAssistance

House of Lords Written Answer

Jerusalem

Baroness Tonge (Non-affiliated) [HL10927] To ask Her Majesty's Government whether the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office considers Jerusalem to be part of Israel; and if so, why.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The position of the UK Government has remained constant since April 1950, when the UK extended de jure recognition to the State of Israel, but withheld recognition of sovereignty over Jerusalem pending a final determination of its status. We recognise Israel's ‘de facto authority’ over West Jerusalem. But in line with Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) and subsequent Council resolutions, we regard East Jerusalem as under Israeli military occupation. A final determination of the status of Jerusalem should be sought as part of a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. It must ensure Jerusalem is a shared capital of the Israeli and Palestinian states, with access and religious rights of both peoples respected.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-30/hl10927

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Israel and Morocco: UK responds to announcement of normalisation

Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said: I welcome the announcement of the normalisation of relations between Israel and Morocco, which is a positive step between two valued partners of the UK. The UK supports efforts to reach negotiated and mutually acceptable political solutions that provide for the self-determination of both the Palestinian people and the people of Western Sahara. Our position on the status of Western Sahara remains unchanged.

United Nations

General Assembly Adopts 34 Draft Resolutions, Decisions from Fourth Committee, Including Texts on Middle East, Decolonization, Information Questions

... The Assembly adopted the resolution “Assistance to Palestine refugees” ... By that text, the General Assembly expresses grave concern at the difficult situation of Palestine refugees under occupation, in particular those in the Gaza Strip, underlining the importance of assistance and urgent reconstruction efforts in the blockaded enclave. ... It went on to adopt the resolution “Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East” ... By that text, the General Assembly expresses deep concern about the Agency’s critical financial situation, noting that contributions have been neither predictable nor sufficient to meet its growing needs. ... Further by that text, however, the Assembly also expresses profound concern that, despite those steps, the UNRWA’s programme budget, funded primarily through voluntary contributions from Member States and intergovernmental organizations, faces persistent shortfalls, increasingly threatening the Agency’s core programmes. By other terms, the Assembly calls upon Israel to ensure the expedited and unimpeded import of all necessary construction materials into Gaza and to reduce the burdensome cost of importing UNRWA supplies. ... The Assembly also adopted the draft “Palestine refugees’ properties and their revenues” ... By that text, the General Assembly requests that the Secretary-General take all appropriate steps to protect Arab properties, assets and property rights in Israel. Further, it calls upon Israel to render all facilities and assistance to the Secretary-General in the resolution’s implementation, and upon all parties concerned to provide the Secretary-General with any pertinent information concerning such property in Israel. Moreover, the Assembly urges the Palestinian and Israeli sides, as agreed between them, to deal with the important issue of Palestine refugees’ properties and their revenues within the framework of final-status peace negotiations. In another recorded vote, the Assembly narrowly adopted the resolution “Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories ... By its terms, the General Assembly requests that the Special Committee continue to investigate Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially violations of the Geneva Convention. ... The Assembly then adopted the resolution “Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan” ... By that text, the General Assembly condemns acts of violence, destruction, harassment, provocation and incitement by Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and calls upon Israel to accept the de jure applicability of the Geneva Convention and comply with all of its obligations under international law. Moreover, it demands that Israel comply with its legal obligations, as mentioned in the advisory opinion rendered on 9 July 2004 by the International Court of Justice. Taking up the resolution “Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, the Assembly adopted it ... By its terms, the General Assembly demands that Israel cease all practices and actions violating the human rights of the Palestinian people, including the killing and injury of civilians, the arbitrary detention and imprisonment of civilians, forced displacement, and any obstruction of humanitarian assistance, among other things. It also demands that Israel comply fully with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and cease all settlement activities, construction of the wall and any other measures aimed at altering the character, status and demographic composition of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Assembly then adopted the resolution “The occupied Syrian Golan” ... By that text,
the General Assembly calls upon Israel to comply with the relevant resolutions and to desist from changing the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan, and in particular to desist from establishing settlements. Further, it calls upon Israel to desist from imposing Israeli citizenship and identity cards on Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan. …

To read the full press release see

Assistance to Palestine refugees

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
https://undocs.org/en/A/75/411

Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Palestine refugees’ properties and their revenues

Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan

Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

The occupied Syrian Golan

Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2622

Assisted Dying Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2592

Education (Assemblies) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579
The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438

Genocide Determination Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2621

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2608

Marriage (Approved Organisations) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2537

Marriage (Authorised Belief Organisations) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2795

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2584

Scottish Parliament

Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

Post-mortem Examinations (Defence Time Limit) (Scotland) Bill

Consultations  ** new or updated today

Hate crime laws (closing date 24 December 2020)
https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/hate-crime/

** Introduction of a statutory opt-out system for organ donation for Northern Ireland (closing date 19 February 2021)
https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/organ-donation

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19 (closing date not stated)
https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/