



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

Ian Mearns (Labour): May I wish my Jewish neighbours, friends and constituents a very happy celebration of deliverance, as they commemorate Purim tonight and tomorrow?

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-02-25/debates/2102257000001/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-DD52DEE0-9F58-424D-9D17-633A6FD1E154>

Business of the House

Christian Wakeford (Conservative): Yesterday, the Union of Jewish Students and the Bristol Jewish Society held a virtual rally to call on the University of Bristol to finally take action against the lecturer David Miller, who brazenly states that Jewish students are an “enemy” that must be “defeated”, that prominent Jewish people and organisations are a “pillar of Islamophobia” and that Jewish students who have the audacity to complain about his comments are part of a Zionist “lobby”, which is a well-known antisemitic conspiracy theory. The rally was called after the university failed to take action, despite the complaint being originally placed in 2019. Can we have time for a debate on the need to improve university complaints procedures, which are failing Jewish students?

Jacob Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend brings to the attention of the House comments that are deeply wicked and the sort of thing that decent people simply do not say. We expect higher education providers to be at the forefront of tackling antisemitism, making sure that higher education is a genuinely fulfilling and welcoming experience for everyone. Providers should have robust policies and procedures in place to comply with the law, to investigate and to swiftly address hate crimes, including any antisemitic incidents that are reported. Antisemitism is one of the most evil creeds and thoughts. It has been a blot on the history of the world for hundreds of years and it has no place in our society. Universities must be part of ensuring that antisemitism ceases to exist.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-02-25/debates/2102257000001/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-DEA627EA-0F6C-4590-900E-DED997A289A7>

Business of the House

Kevin Hollinrake (Conservative): ... Could we have a debate in Government time on the future of faith schools? Ampleforth school in my constituency has had problems in the past, it is fair to say, but those are now behind it. Yet there are some in the education system who are using some relatively minor issues more recently as a pretext for the potential closure of the school. Could we have a debate in Government time so that we can send a very strong message that this House believes that faith schools are an important part of our education system going forward?

Jacob Rees-Mogg: Faith schools are fundamentally important, and it is a right of parents to choose to have their children educated in their own faith. That is something of importance to all communities. My hon. Friend rightly says that Ampleforth has had very serious problems in the past, but I understand it now has a new headmaster who has reformed matters and that a decision is awaited from the Secretary of State on its future for admissions. I will pass on to the Secretary of State what my hon. Friend has said, but I absolutely underline what he says: faith schools are a right to which parents ought to be entitled. Speaking as a Catholic, I think that Catholic education is of very considerable importance and worth supporting, and Benedictine education is a particularly noble part of that.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-02-25/debates/2102257000001/BusinessOfTheHouse#contribution-D1705443-F6C8-44E7-AB0E-7768018F05C5>

House of Commons Written Answer

Hate Crime

Julian Lewis (Conservative) [156232] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the definition of hate crime as any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic is compatible with the principles of the (a) objective application of justice, (b) equal treatment under the law and (c) presumption of innocence unless proved guilty; what (i) internal and (ii) cross-departmental assessments have recently been carried out of the operation of (A) legislation and (B) guidelines defining crimes in terms of people's perceptions; and if she will make a statement.

Victoria Atkins: The police and Crown Prosecution Service define and record hate crime as "any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender."

Part of the purpose of this definition is to encourage victims of hate crime to come forward to report, reflecting the recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. It is the responsibility of the police to investigate allegations of criminal activity and decide whether or not a specific incident should be treated as a hate crime.

In 2018 the Government asked the Law Commission to undertake a full review of the coverage and approach of current hate crime legislation. That review is due to conclude this year.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/156232>

Information about the Law Commission review referred to above can be read at <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/hate-crime/>

Race Disparity Unit, Cabinet Office

Government updates on identifying and tackling COVID-19 disparities

... Comparing first and early second wave data, disparities have improved for some ethnic groups including Black Africans, Black Caribbean, Chinese and Indians but have worsened for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. ...

As more at-risk groups are identified, the government's vaccine rollout has continued, with over 18 million receiving their first dose. Research highlighted in the report shows that though people are positive about the vaccine, some ethnic minority people held negative feelings, influenced by media narratives and other misinformation, and stated that they were hesitant to take the jab. According to the ONS, from early December 2020 to early January 2021, less than half (49%) of Black or Black British adults reported that they were likely to have the vaccine. The latest OpenSAFELY data reports that approximately 60% of black people over 70 have been vaccinated compared to 75% for South Asians and 90% of white people. ...

Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, said: "Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this Government has done everything it can to protect everyone in this country.

"The latest data shows that this is not a one-size-fits-all situation. Outcomes have improved for some ethnic minority groups since the first wave, but we know some communities are still particularly vulnerable. Our response will continue to be driven by the latest evidence and data and targeted at those who are most at risk.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel, and as the vaccine rollout continues, I urge everyone who is offered one to take the opportunity, to protect themselves, their family, and their community." ...

Dr Jenny Harries OBE, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, said: ... "It is vital that we recognise the breadth of diversity within the UK and the multitude of different risk variables. Different groups have experienced different outcomes during both waves of the virus for a variety of reasons. ...

Professor Nita Forouhi, Programme Leader and MRC Investigator, Epidemiologist and Professor of Population Health and Nutrition, MRC Epidemiology Unit, University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine, said: "The differences in COVID-19 deaths between ethnic groups in the early second wave compared with the first highlight the changing trajectories of ethnic disparities, suggesting different factors are at play and it is unhelpful to consider ethnic groups in a single category of 'BAME'. The lower COVID-19 death rates in the early second wave in some groups shows that ethnic inequalities are not fixed but are mainly driven by risk of infection and amenable to change. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-updates-on-identifying-and-tackling-covid-19-disparities>

Second quarterly report on progress to address COVID-19 health inequalities

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/965093/Second Covid Disparities Report Final 2 .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/965093/Second_Covid_Disparities_Report_Final_2_.pdf)

Commission for Countering Extremism

Commission for Countering Extremism publishes legal review

... The landmark report "Operating with Impunity - Hateful extremism: The need for a legal framework" demonstrates how many hateful extremists are able to operate lawfully. This is due to a lack of legislation designed to capture the specific activity of hateful extremism. As the report evidences, hateful extremists are creating a climate conducive to hate crime, terrorism or other violence; or are attempting to erode and even destroy the fundamental

rights and freedoms of our democratic society ...

Lead Commissioner Sara Khan says: Since the 2005 London bombings, one of the long-standing conundrums for the British Government has been how to deal with extremist groups or individuals who are not caught by counter-terrorism legislation, but who are creating a climate that is conducive to terrorism and other societal harms. Previous attempts - such as the 2015 Extremism Bill - were unfocused and rightly criticised because of an inability to ensure the protection of freedom of expression and other civil liberties. Our report shows how it is possible to square this circle. We have charted a path the government can take which will ensure protection of freedom of expression while restricting the dangerous activity of hateful extremism.

Extremist groups whether neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, Islamist or others are able to operate lawfully, freely and with impunity. They are actively radicalising others and are openly propagating for the erosion of our fundamental democratic rights. Their aim is to subvert our democracy. This is a threat to our civilised democratic order, which cannot be taken for granted and requires a robust, necessary and proportionate legal response.

That is why we are calling on the government to commit to devising a new legal and operational framework to capture the specific activity of hateful extremism. Without such a framework this activity will continue unchallenged and the many harms it is causing in our country will continue to persist and worsen in the next decade.

Sir Mark Rowley says: ... Not only have our laws failed to keep pace with the evolving threat of modern-day extremism, current legal boundaries allow extremists to operate with impunity. They are carefully steering around existing laws in the ways we describe in our report, openly glorifying terrorism, collecting and sharing some of the most violent extremist propaganda, or intentionally stirring up racial or religious hatred against others. Hateful extremism is creating an ever-bigger pool for terrorists to recruit from, as well as increasing violence, hate crime and tensions between and within communities. ...

That is why Sara and I are convinced that it is now critical for government to devise a new legal and operational framework to counter hateful extremism to strengthen our response, both online and offline. We are at a watershed moment and action is required urgently. ...

The Commission have now put forward a new working definition for hateful extremism as: Activity or materials directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to an in-group motivated by or intending to advance a political, religious or racial supremacist ideology:

- a. To create a climate conducive to hate crime, terrorism or other violence; or
- b. Attempt to erode or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of our democratic society as protected under Article 17 of Schedule 1 to the HRA 1998.

The report has found in the absence of legislation to address hateful extremism in Britain, it is currently lawful to:

- glorify terrorism, so long as one avoids encouraging the commission, preparation, or instigation of acts of terrorism or related offences ...
- intentionally stir up racial hatred, so long as one avoids being threatening, abusive or insulting and, in the case of religious hatred, avoids being threatening when doing so
 - for example: forming a Neo-Nazi extremist group which persistently praises the actions of Adolf Hitler and encourages members to spread Holocaust denial material and antisemitic conspiracy theories, so long as it is not abusive, insulting, or threatening
- publish and distribute material to intentionally stir up racial or religious hatred as long as the material avoids being threatening, abusive, or insulting in its content
- collect material that encourages terrorism, including material which seeks to persuade the reader to commit terrorist acts, so long as the person does not possess it in circumstances which give rise to a reasonable suspicion that the possession is for a purpose connected with the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism. This is true even for the most extreme violent

terrorist material, such as torture and executions.

Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations to government:

- To commission a legal and operational framework to robustly counter the hateful extremism threat.
- To expand current offences relating to stirring up of hatred and strengthen current resources and capability of law enforcement agencies.
- To elevate hateful extremism to be a priority threat alongside terrorism and online child sexual exploitation; and to implement the most robust proposals in the Online Harms White Paper. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-for-countering-extremism-publishes-legal-review>

Operating with Impunity Hateful extremism: The need for a legal framework

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963156/CCE_Operating_with_Impunity_Accessible.pdf

Scottish Parliament Oral Answer

Places of Worship (Reopening)

Elaine Smith (Labour): In Parliament on Tuesday, the First Minister said that she hoped that communal worship would restart on 5 April, which is the day after Easter Sunday. However, she went on to suggest that it could happen a few days earlier, possibly in time for important religious festivals such as Passover and Easter Sunday, which is the greatest Christian feast day.

If the First Minister will not allow the immediate reopening of places of worship to give Scottish Christians and members of other faiths equality with those in the rest of the United Kingdom, will she at least confirm on what date she intends to allow places of worship to reopen, and whether she will base access on the size of a church or other premises, rather than on an arbitrary number of 20 people? Will she also confirm that meaningful discussions are taking place with religious leaders on the matter?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, constructive discussions are taking place. On Tuesday, I said that I recognise that 5 April falls just after Easter and Passover, and that we would take account of that. Assuming that that phase of reopening can start, it would absolutely be the intention to allow places of worship to open in time for the full Easter weekend. On the question of discussions with faith leaders, later on Tuesday afternoon, I had discussions with the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and confirmed that to him.

In terms of the restrictions on numbers, we will need to carefully consider the state of the virus, because it is about keeping people safe. We want people to be able to go to churches to worship, but we want them to be safe from Covid as well. If we are able to start that phase of reopening, we will ensure that it happens for places of worship in time for those important religious festivals.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13153&i=119080#ScotParlOR>

The First Minister's statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13147&i=118979&c=2322369#ScotParlOR>

Scottish Parliament Written Answers

The following two questions both received the same answer

Vaccination: Covid-19

S5W-33894 Jeremy Balfour (Conservative): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether people employed in the funeral sector who are required to enter domestic properties, care homes and other environments that might see them exposed to the COVID-19 virus should be prioritised for access to vaccinations, and by what date it expects all such employees to be (a) offered a vaccine and (b) vaccinated.

S5W-33913 Alexander Burnett (Conservative): To ask the Scottish Government whether funeral directors and crematorium staff will be part of the second phase of key workers receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

Jeane Freeman: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) priority list has been updated to include funeral workers who are considered frontline funeral operatives and mortuary technicians / embalmers, as they are both at risk of exposure and likely to spend a considerable amount of time in care homes and hospital settings where they may also expose multiple patients. They will be eligible for vaccination under category 2 of the JCVI list.

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-33894>

and

<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-33913>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

International Criminal Court

Chris Green (Conservative) [156447] To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what discussions he has had with his International counterparts on the implications for military personnel of the ruling that non-state actors can initiate proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC), with reference to the February 2021 decision that the ICC has jurisdiction over the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

James Heapey: We closely follow the work of the International Criminal Court and are looking at the implications of this decision.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/156447>

The decision referred to above can be read at

https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2021_01165.PDF

A partly dissenting decision from Judge Péter Kovács can be read at

https://www.icc-cpi.int/RelatedRecords/CR2021_01167.PDF

A partly separate decision from Judge Perrin de Brichambaut can be read at

https://www.icc-cpi.int/RelatedRecords/CR2021_01166.PDF

Israel: Embassies

Scott Benton (Conservative) [152666] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of moving the UK Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

James Cleverly: The British Embassy to Israel is based in Tel Aviv and we have

no plans to move it.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-10/152666>

Israel: Judiciary

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [153156] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with international counterparts on (a) judicial independence and (b) judicial accountability in Israel.

James Cleverly: The Foreign Secretary regularly discusses matters of international justice with counterparts. He has had no recent discussions about Israel's internal justice system.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-11/153156>

Palestinians: Children

Rachel Hopkins (Labour) [152681] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 December 2020 to Question 128695, what response his Department has received from the Israeli authorities on their investigation into the death of 15-year old Ali Abu Alia; and if he will make further representations to progress a conclusion in this case.

James Cleverly: We continue to urge Israel to ensure that its investigation into this case is swift and comprehensive. We also continue to stress the importance of the Israeli security forces providing appropriate protection to the Palestinian civilian population, in particular the need to protect children, and urge restraint in the use of live fire.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-10/152681>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-12-11/128695>

Israel: Palestinians

Stephen Timms (Labour) [156243] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department has taken since 2018 to press for an end to the practice of holding Palestinian children in Israeli military detention.

James Cleverly: We remain committed to working with Israel to secure improvements to the practices surrounding children in detention and regularly raise this with the Israeli Ministry of Justice, most recently on 23 February 2021. Our Embassy in Tel Aviv will continue to have a regular dialogue with Israel on this issue. We also fund projects providing legal aid to assist children with legal representation and capacity building assistance to local lawyers. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/156243>

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Working towards a two-state solution: Statement by Ambassador Barbara Woodward at the Security Council briefing on the Middle East

... In order to build trust between the parties and populations, unilateral acts must also cease. The UK has called on the Government of Israel to end the demolition of Palestinian homes and structures in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The latest demolitions in Humsa Al-Baqai'a have again made this vulnerable Palestinian community, including children, homeless. We urge the Government of Israel to allow the unimpeded delivery of vital humanitarian aid. We also call on the Government of Israel to refrain from the

destruction or confiscation of such aid once it's delivered. ...

We join Palestinian women, and all Palestinians, in rejecting the recent changes made by Hamas – the de facto authorities in Gaza – to travel arrangements from Gaza, which will limit Gazan women's independence and liberty. We call for this decision to be fully reversed, and for all parties to ensure greater freedoms and protections for women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We are clear that the parties must work together to deliver meaningful improvements for Palestinians and Israelis. ... We welcome cooperation on vaccine access, and encourage the Government of Israel to facilitate the transfer of vaccines to the Palestinian Authority when required. We also need to see tangible and time-bound commitments from the parties to address long-standing barriers to development of the Palestinian economy. ...

Finally, I'd like to welcome the continued progress towards legislative and Presidential elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As we have heard today, Palestinians need free and fair elections, as a pathway to accountable institutions, based on respect for the rule of law and human rights.

The UK remains committed to a two-state solution. We will continue to work with the parties to the conflict, to build the conditions for a permanent agreement. As our briefers today have made clear, we must work towards a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. A just and lasting resolution that ends the occupation and delivers peace is the best way to achieve such a future.

To read the full transcript see

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

United Nations

Palestinian elections raise hopes for two-State solution, Middle East Coordinator tells Security Council

The holding of free and fair elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territory will help “clear the path” for restoring a legitimate political horizon to realize a long sought two-State solution, the leading UN diplomat for the region told the Security Council on Friday.

“The depth of the task is daunting, but not insurmountable”, said Tor Wennesland, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. “We must seize emerging opportunities.”

With the upcoming elections offering just such an occasion, he pointed to the “extraordinarily high” registration rate among Palestinians as a “resoundingly positive” response.

The elections will provide a crucial step towards re-establishing Palestinian national unity – and renewing the legitimacy of national institutions, including a democratically elected Legislative Council and Government in Palestine, he assured. ...

On COVID vaccination prospects, he welcomed the announcement of the Palestinian vaccination strategy and the initial allocation to the Palestinian Ministry of Health of 37,440 doses of vaccines by the COVAX-AMC facility. In February, 30,000 doses of vaccines were delivered to Palestinians, including in Gaza, by the Russian Federation and the United Arab Emirates.

He said this is in addition to Israel's earlier transfer of 5,200 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority, vaccination of 5,000 Palestinian educational and health workers working in Israel, and efforts to vaccinate the population in East Jerusalem, which is 50 per cent complete.

He went on to describe developments on the ground, expressing concern over Israel's demolition or seizure of 170 Palestinian structures in Area C and 10 in East Jerusalem. ...

Turning to the region as a whole, on the Golan, he said the ceasefire between Israel and Syria has been generally maintained. However, the security situation continues to be

volatile, with continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement by the parties. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1085922>

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee

Government response: No prosperity without justice: the UK's relationship with Iran

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4844/documents/48609/default/>

The report to which the above is a response can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3987/documents/40221/default/>

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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>

Domestic Abuse Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2709>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2579>

Freedom of Speech (Universities) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2820>

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

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/domestic-abuse-protection-scotland-bill>

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 3 days**

Human Rights Act Review (closing date 3 March 2021)

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/93/human-rights-joint-committee/news/138635/call-for-evidence-the-governments-independent-human-rights-act-review/>

The future of the [Welsh Government] Equality and Inclusion Funding Programme
(closing date 30 March 2021)

<https://gov.wales/future-equality-and-inclusion-funding-programme>

**** Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS): Documenting the Lives of Ethnic and Religious Minorities in a Time of Crisis** (closing date not stated)

bit.ly/evensurvey

Social Distance, Digital Congregation: British Ritual Innovation under COVID-19
(closing date not stated)

<https://bric19.mmu.ac.uk/take-the-survey/>

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438