



# Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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## Home Affairs

### House of Lords Debate

#### **Domestic Abuse Bill: Report Stage, House of Lords**

Clause 1: Definition of “domestic abuse”

Amendment 1

Moved by Baroness Altmann

1: Clause 1, page 2, line 3, at end insert—

“(f) unreasonable prevention or threat of prevention of dissolution of a religious Jewish marriage via a religious bill of divorce (a “get”);” Member’s explanatory statement

This specifically itemises one spouse unreasonably preventing the dissolution of a Jewish religious marriage with a “get” as being within the scope of the Bill by bringing it under the definition of abusive behaviour.

*col 1318* **Baroness Altmann (Conservative):** My Lords, I will also speak to the other amendments in this group in my name and those of the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, and the noble Lords, Lord Mendelsohn and Lord Palmer. I am grateful for their cross-party support.

These amendments relate to a particular form of abuse which has long been of concern to me as a British citizen of Jewish faith, whereby a spouse—usually the husband—unreasonably prevents the dissolution of his Jewish religious marriage and denies his wife the freedom to move on with her life. We seek to ensure that such behaviour is recognised as a defined form of abuse under this Bill, so that the wife can receive the support and help provided for victims.

I should stress that the majority of Jewish divorces proceed in accordance with religious laws, especially once the civil divorce settlement is agreed, but there are instances in which a husband deliberately refuses. Sometimes this is to extort money from the wife or her family; sometimes it is to wield power and control out of bitterness or spite; sometimes it is out of a vengeful desire to inflict long-term suffering on the ex-wife. The objective here is to support the victim, who is being treated as a chattel rather than as a person and denied her basic rights. ...

There is no intention here to undermine the role of the Jewish courts, which govern Jewish religious laws and which require the husband to voluntarily sign an official Jewish bill of

divorce document, called a get. This can only be initiated by the husband in order to dissolve their Jewish marriage.

There is an entire legal framework governing all aspects of Jewish life, dating back to Biblical times. Although the present-day Jewish courts, known as batte din, and the judges, or dayanim, have been seeking ways to facilitate a process that can free the woman by means of persuasion or negotiation, this process is clearly open to abuse. The wife remains chained in the marriage and, if she wishes to stand by her faith, she cannot date or remarry another man unless she has been given the get. ...

*col 1319* We hope that these changes will assist rabbinic courts, so that fewer men will play these kinds of cruel games. ... We recognise that civil divorce is not a substitute for a get, without which, no matter how long the couple have been separated, they are still not considered religiously divorced. This legislation hopes to provide—and these amendments seek to achieve—a wake-up call for Jewish husbands, so that they recognise that it is socially unacceptable to refuse to religiously divorce their wives. ... It should be as inappropriate in this day and age for a Jewish man to refuse his wife a get as it is for a man to inappropriately fondle a woman or make lewd comments about her looks. We are seeking mindset change.

I hugely regret that this remains an issue for the rabbinic authorities, who have been unable sufficiently to overcome the problem that this causes for women. I understand and fully respect that these are difficult points of Torah, Talmudic and Mishnaic law, which I do not claim to have detailed legal knowledge of. I bow to the legislators in this country on Jewish matters, but I believe that we have a duty to ensure that these Jewish women are protected. They are entitled to the same protections as other victims of abuse. ...

The later amendments in this group, Amendments 74, 79 and 80, are designed to clarify that the Serious Crime Act 2015 definition of controlling or coercive behaviour covers a situation where a Jewish couple is separated or divorced under secular law and no longer cohabiting, but the religious marriage is not yet dissolved and the husband persistently refuses to give a get. The amendments seek to confirm the previous belief, not yet tested in court, that such a husband could be prosecuted for the crime of controlling or coercive behaviour and face criminal sanctions, even if the couple are no longer living together. However, I am pleased to tell the House that I will not need to move these amendments as Amendment 45 in a later group, in the name of the noble Baroness, Lady Lister of Burtersett, has the support of the Minister and of my noble friends Lady Bertin and Lady Sanderson.

That amendment would explicitly establish that post-separation abuse is covered by the 2015 Act, and that an unreasonable get refusal would potentially be a serious crime. ...

*col 1320* The domestic abuse commissioner has stated that she welcomes these proposed amendments to the Bill and that she recognises that this would be a form of coercive behaviour on the grounds of psychological or economic abuse or coercion. She has requested and recommended that this issue be included in statutory guidance under the heading of “wider spiritual abuse”. ...

Although I stressed clearly that these amendments are designed to relate solely to Jewish religious divorces, with no intention to impact on any other religious groups, we understand that there were concerns of a read-across to other religions. ...

I have also been grateful for ministerial assurances that unreasonable and persistent refusal to give a wife a get is already covered by the broad definitions of abuse in the Bill, and I have received assurances that this will be explicitly mentioned in the statutory guidance. I would be grateful if my noble friend would confirm this and, on that basis, I would therefore accept that this issue need not be in the Bill and I do not intend to press the amendment to a vote. I beg to move Amendment 1.

**Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat):** ... I would have preferred for these amendments, clear as they are, to be in the Bill. However, I have to accept, as has the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, for the moment, that the problem lies with current

interpretations of the rules of Jewish marriage, and not with a parliamentary solution. ... I accept that the Government have been sympathetic and have sought by practical means of guidance issued to help those affected ...

*col 1321* I am grateful for this assistance, but it is not enough. ... I will continue to call for a more sympathetic approach from the Beth Din religious authorities. They rely on the Catch-22 absurdity that a Jewish divorce is not recognised if the recalcitrant husband is seen to be “coerced” into giving a get, resulting in the divorce not being recognised in Jewish law. Thus the agunah, or chained woman, is prohibited from having intimate relations with a man other than her husband and cannot remarry in an orthodox ceremony. In a really unacceptable denial of rights, the children will have severe restrictions placed upon them. Children should not suffer in this way, whatever the reason. ...

**Lord Mackay of Clashfern (Conservative):** ... The problem arises, as has been explained, for a person of the Jewish faith who is married and then decides to seek divorce. If she is female, she may get a decree of divorce in the English courts, but the Jewish law to which she feels bound requires that she cannot be divorced under that law without the agreement of her husband. Some husbands who have been divorced by the English courts decline to agree that the wife should be allowed to divorce under the Jewish law which they have both agreed to follow. In that situation, the husband is able to hold the wife into the marriage which she has made clear she wishes to leave.

The exercise of power by the husband is a controlling or coercive power within the meaning of Clause 1(3) of the Bill. Since they are both over the age of 16 and have been personally connected within the meaning of Clause 2(1)(a) of the Bill, it is clear that the husband is showing what under the Bill is described—and this will shortly become law—as domestic abuse towards the wife and therefore is subject to the remedies for her provided in the Bill. No distinct amendment is required in order to bring the wife into the situation where she can receive the help that the Bill will provide when it becomes an Act. ...

*col 1322* **Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** ... By accepting the need to stigmatise husbands who behave unreasonably in not giving a get, the Government are sending a signal to spiteful men and to fossilised religious authorities that compassion and secular standards have to prevail. ... The ability to refuse a religious divorce provides abusive husbands with power to control and to subvert conditions relating to the divorce, by, for example, demanding that the divorce settlement be repaid. The refusal can have a grievous effect on a woman’s entire life. ...

I am not defending the religious law underlying this, and it is not confined to Judaism. Nevertheless, it is accepted by some women here, and by millions around the world, but it is time for the secular law principles to prevail, all the more so since from this autumn, we will have no-fault divorce, a system which does not allow the unwilling spouse to defend a divorce at all—it must be accepted. The guidance, which I hope will contain these provisions, is a good example of how British law manages to encompass a diversity of views within its system. A man who refuses a get unreasonably in the future may even be found guilty of a criminal offence of coercive and controlling behaviour, under the Serious Crime Act 2015, because this Bill clarifies that domestic abuse provisions apply to former couples, even after separation. Nevertheless, this provision would work more effectively as a threat than an actual imprisonment, because the get must be granted by the husband without direct coercion. ...

*col 1323* **Lord Winston (Labour):** ... It is embarrassing for someone such as myself to try persuading an English Parliament, to which I am absolutely committed, to help with Jewish law. I would also say that these instances of irreligious men hiding behind their religious cloak is much rarer than one might think, but none the less, there is this very important case for a few people where the future happiness of a woman, her freedom and, to some extent, the possibility of her having children is so important to her and to the community. ...

*col 1324* **Baroness Uddin (Non-affiliated):** ... Violence and abuse often beget another

generation of violence, not in all families, but some are so scathed by the pain, humiliation and loss of hope, respect and self-esteem, and mental and physical well-being, that this impacts all aspects of their lives. ... This Bill is our pledge that we will uphold a society which liberates victims and survivors to live free of the fear of violence and abuse and, more importantly, institutionalise justice, freedom and liberty from aggressors and their assailants. ...

I wish to address the amendment of the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, and her call for get refusal to be recognised as a form of domestic abuse within the statutory definition to ensure that Jewish women are protected and can access a DAPO on the grounds that a get is being withheld by an abuser. ...

*col 1325* I am in awe of the leadership of the noble Baroness, Lady Altmann, in getting us to this point. If husbands who refuse wives religious divorce are likely to be prosecuted, it would be a godsend, not just for Jewish women, as it would give hope to other women of faith, including Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus—many of whom often discover, when there is a violent incident or separation, that their religious ceremonies are not recognised by the laws of our country. This blights the lives of countless women and families who have no recourse to the laws. ...

**Lord Cormack (Conservative):** ... As a great admirer of the Jewish community and what it has contributed to our national life over many centuries, I believe that what my noble friend is arguing for today is something that we should all recognise as a legitimate request. I was delighted to hear her comments that she believes that this will be covered, even though her own amendment will not be pressed to a Division. ...

*col 1326* **Lord Mendelsohn (Labour):** ... There is indeed progress. As my noble friends have said, there are some clear indications for some modest but significant improvements as outlined. Crucially, I hope we will hear some reassurance, building on what was said in Committee, that statutory guidance, as provided for in Clause 73, will take into account the measures proposed in the amendments. ...

The Government have made a number of arguments as to why they could not go further or place these matters on the face of the Bill. Indeed, there is a reasonable point that the Government have not had enough time to tease through all the different implications for all faiths on this matter. There is a less persuasive point about drafting preferences.

There are two arguments, however, that are surely utterly wrong and incompatible with the underlying intentions behind this Bill: namely, that this is only domestic abuse in certain circumstances and that English law alone cannot solve this matter. A plainly gender-specific arrangement which places women where they have less rights and power in courts, which are exclusively run by the decisions of men, is wrong. This is not a situation we should accept, nor is it an arrangement we should settle for, even under any calculation of what religious freedoms should be accorded to faith communities in our country.

In Holland, the courts have been making rulings which have included fines and even imprisonment of husbands unwilling to deliver gets, with all the support of the rabbinate and the religious courts. In fact, under Dutch jurisprudence since 2002, which was strengthened in specific legislation just a couple of years ago—and which has been accessed by Jewish women across Europe, including, previously, some from the UK who, unfortunately, can no longer access it now—the secular courts are able to unchain Jewish women in these circumstances. The distinguished Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the head of the conference of European orthodox rabbis, supports this measure, as does rabbi Aryeh Ralbag, the former chief rabbi of Amsterdam, who now works in the orthodox courts in New York to bring reform and change. They support the Dutch judiciary's proactive approach and recognise that, over 2,000 years, the role of the religious courts and the nature of Jewish communities in modern times is different. In response to the opposition of those who resist any notion that secular values or laws should ever interfere in how the Jewish law operates in liberal democracies. Rabbi Ralbag has powerfully said: "Am I concerned that this is creating a precedent for interference? In some places, yes, I am.

But I and every rabbi need to measure this against the pain and suffering that is being visited on Jewish women right now. And right now, this is what we can do to help”.

*col 1327* Regrettably, we are a long way from that here in the UK, but this is something that I think should inspire us that more can and must be done through this Bill ... I have been shocked at how some members of the legal profession have been providing the use of the get as a bargaining chip to ensure that women cannot receive what the law is clear and firm they are fully entitled to.

These issues go much deeper than the granting of the get and involve many cases that do not even touch the sides of the religious courts, where they are prepared to intervene. So while I am grateful to the Government for the progress that I hope the Minister will confirm during his speech, we cannot be satisfied with where we are. There is a huge duty on leaders in the Jewish community to face up to this dark side. ...

**Lord Mann (Non-affiliated):** ... whenever there is an unequivocal imbalance in power relations, that affects behaviour. ... One cannot go fairly into a separation negotiation if the other side has additional cards that are greater than the ones you possess. ...

That brings me to my second point ... There is no purpose in having an unelected Second Chamber if it does not represent the diversity of the communities out there. With these amendments and the Government’s arguments against them, we see a juxtaposition of the best and the not so good. Here we see a community effectively represented, by Members from across the range of the political spectrum knowledgeably putting forward their expertise to the Government and to the House. But if we are to have a purpose here and carry out the precise role that an unelected Chamber needs to, we need to be far more inclusive of all communities across the country. ...

*col 1328* **Lord Polak (Conservative):** ... I spoke to a close family member who happens to be going through a divorce and, as she said, if via this Bill only one woman, one agunah, were spared the indignity, the abuse, the embarrassment and the hurt and were enabled to rebuild her life then that would be a good result. How much more important it is if, by passing these focused and narrow amendments, we can help many more than just one agunah. ...

*col 1320* **Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Labour):** My Lords, Labour is happy to support this group of amendments but recognises the realities of abuse that different communities face. We must ensure that what is in the Bill works in practice for victims of all backgrounds in the UK. ...

Inclusion in the Bill provides the opportunity to ensure that its provisions and protections are applicable to all. It specifically recognises the plight of these women by removing the shadow of abuse and control, restoring their right to exercise their faith through their ability to remarry and have children within their faith. The recognition would also offer these women other protections under the Act, once it is passed, if they are specifically included. ...

*col 1330* **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice:** ... Amendments 1 and 3 would add a sixth limb to the list of behaviours in Clause 1(3) which count as abusive; namely, the unreasonable refusal to agree to the granting of a religious bill of divorce, or get, which is necessary to dissolve a Jewish religious marriage. The threat of such a refusal would also be caught by the amendment. It is undeniable that women who are refused a get by their husbands suffer long-lasting and significant consequences. A woman who has not received a get is regarded in the eyes of Jewish religious law as still married. She is therefore unable to remarry, but that is not the only disability which she suffers. Perhaps more importantly, if she does not remarry but has further children with another Jewish partner, those children will be severely restricted as a matter of Jewish law as to whom they are later able to marry.

The term applied in Jewish law to a woman whose husband refuses to give her a get, being an “agunah” or “chained”, is thus apt and tragic. I know that Jewish religious authorities

are concerned about the problem but have not, so far, found a solution to it within Jewish religious law. That is a source of regret to many, but not something which English law alone can solve. ... it is a matter which ultimately, so far as Jewish law is concerned, the Jewish religious authorities themselves have to deal with. ...

*col 1331* While English law cannot solve this problem, there is something which English law can and should deal with. ... English law can recognise that the refusal to grant a religious dissolution is all too often about the exertion of control by one spouse over the other—almost invariably, in the context of a get, by the husband over the wife—and, as such, may be considered a form of domestic abuse in certain circumstances

However, as my noble friend Lady Williams outlined in her response in Committee, we consider that this would sit better in the statutory guidance on domestic abuse provided for in Clause 73, rather than in the Bill. Again, as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, identified, that is because the list of abusive behaviours included in the definition is purposefully drafted to be high level. That definition is therefore to be applied by the courts and other agencies on a case-by-case, fact-specific basis. Including specific circumstances in the Bill, such as a refusal to grant a get, may lead to calls for inclusion of other examples which would have two adverse consequences. First, as a matter of drafting, it would make the definition unwieldy. Secondly, we do not want to give the impression by including specific examples that there is a hierarchy of abuse. ...

While we would not want to prescribe in statute what statutory guidance must contain, the House will have heard my own and my noble friend Lady Williams' previous commitments during Committee and subsequent discussions to address this issue in the statutory guidance provided for in Clause 73. ...

I am pleased that we have now included specific reference to refusal to grant a get within the draft guidance. We have also included a specific case study on get refusal ... Let me say this clearly and unambiguously: there are, and no doubt will be, cases in which the refusal to give a get may be considered a form of domestic abuse. ...

*col 1332* Turning back to the statutory guidance, we have also added a new section on spiritual abuse, a particular form of abuse where perpetrators use the victim's faith or other belief system to control them. ...

... this applies to all faiths. Spiritual abuse is not faith specific, and I assure the noble Lord, Lord Mann, that the Government's approach is to be absolutely inclusive of all communities within our country. ...

I turn now to Amendment 74, which seeks to ensure that partners in a Jewish religious marriage which has not been dissolved can be considered within the definition of "intimate personal relationship" within the Serious Crime Act 2015, whether or not they continue to be married under civil law or live together. My noble friends will have seen that we intend to support the amendment tabled by the noble Baroness, Lady Lister, which would remove the "living together" requirement contained within the controlling or coercive behaviour offence. Therefore, Amendment 74 is now unnecessary.

I turn finally to Amendment 80, which seeks to ensure that the unreasonable refusal to dissolve a religious marriage be regarded as a significant factor in the consideration of whether a person has suffered domestic abuse, whether a domestic abuse protection order should be issued, and the production by relevant local authorities of strategies for the provision of domestic abuse support, as required by Clause 55. My remarks just now about what is appropriate to include on the face of the Bill, and what to include in guidance, apply equally to the first limb of this amendment, on the determination of domestic abuse. On the second limb of the amendment, which refers to domestic abuse protection orders, it would not be appropriate for the Government to direct the judiciary as to what it must consider when deciding whether to grant such an order. That is a matter for the courts. The amendment is, in any event, unnecessary. The conditions which must be satisfied before a court can make a DAPO will already enable a court to make such an order if the behaviour amounts to abusive behaviour under Clause 1(3). ...

col 1333 The noble Lord, Lord Mendelsohn, referred to the approach in Holland, and said that the Jewish religious authorities ought to look at the approach there. It is not for the Government to identify what might or might not be an appropriate solution to this problem from the point of view of Jewish religious law. It is fair to say, as the noble Lord mentioned, that there are different answers or proposed answers to a very long-standing question. ...

**Baroness Altmann:** ... Every noble Lord who spoke supported this group of amendments. I hope that, on International Women's Day, this will help promote a mindset change among Jewish men, or men of any faith, that the position of power they may find themselves in should not be exercised against the interests of their wives. I accept that the broad definitions do cover get refusal, and I appreciate my noble friend's unambiguous statements to that effect. On the basis of the assurances that I have most gratefully received, I will not be moving my Amendments 3, 74, 79 and 80 ... I beg leave to withdraw my Amendment 1.

Amendment 1 withdrawn. ...

**To read the full transcript see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-08/debates/340A2BF5-B7C1-4F3E-91B6-48C31AB93791/DomesticAbuseBill>

## House of Commons Written Answer

### Church Services: Coronavirus

**Jim Shannon (DUP)** [162605] To ask the Member for South West Bedfordshire, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he has made of whether the online broadcasting of services during the covid-19 outbreak has increased the number of people participating in worship.

**Andrew Selous:** The Church of England has seen a significant increase in public engagement with its online resources over the pandemic.

The National Church Institutions have produced a weekly online Sunday Service in video form since Mothering Sunday 2020, as well as the Daily Hope telephone line, podcasts and apps. The Sunday services have had more than 3.7 million views on Facebook and YouTube. A further 20,000 local online services and events have been listed on

[www.AChurchNearYou.com](http://www.AChurchNearYou.com)

over the last year.

2020 saw an increase of almost 50% in downloads of Church of England apps for prayer and worship, with the apps used around 8 million times during this period.

The National Institutions have continued to create resources for the major festivals, accessible on its website and social media. The current campaign #LiveLent is designed to take people on a journey of preparation ahead of Easter Day. This follows on from the #ComfortAndJoy resources, which reached millions during Advent and Christmas.

Most cathedrals and a majority of parishes offer a variety of online services and events: weekly services, morning and evening prayer, children and youth projects and social activities. These have helped grow worshipping communities nationally and internationally. Recent evidence has also shown that attendance at traditional Book of Common Prayer services has grown dramatically. More available here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/stories-and-features/book-common-prayer-services-see-huge-numbers-tuning-seeking>

Digital services have also improved accessibility for those with disabilities.

Digital services are likely to continue for the time being and these will be different in each parish as clergy respond to local needs and circumstances. Training has been provided throughout the pandemic to thousands of clergy and laypeople to

improve skills and familiarise themselves with the variety of platforms available.  
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-03/162605>

## House of Lords Written Answer

### Social Media: Racial Discrimination

**Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-affiliated)** [HL13524] To ask Her Majesty's Government what action they plan to take to tackle racism on social media platforms.

**Baroness Barran:** Racism online is completely unacceptable in an open and tolerant society. We must do all we can to tackle it.

The Government is committed to tackling racism, including the spread of racist content online. In December 2020, we published the full government response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation, which sets out new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. Under a new legal duty of care, in-scope companies, including social media, will need to tackle illegal content and activity on their services and take swift and effective action against such material.

Companies providing high-risk, high-reach services will also need to undertake regular assessments of the risk posed to adults by legal but harmful material on their services. These companies will need to set clear terms and conditions which explicitly state what categories of legal but harmful material they accept (and do not accept) on their service. Companies will need to enforce these terms and conditions consistently and transparently and could face enforcement action if they do not. The Online Safety Bill, which will give effect to the regulatory framework, will be ready this year.

The full government response also set out plans to publish an Online Media Literacy Strategy. The Strategy will explore the existing media literacy landscape, and set out the Government's plans to ensure a coordinated and strategic approach to media literacy education for all citizens. This will support users to make informed and safer decisions online, including taking action against online hate such as racism.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/hl13524>

*The government response referred to above can be read at*

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

## Charity Commission

### Regulator launches campaign to help charity trustees be “certain in uncertain times”

A suite of 5 visually engaging animated videos will launch across social media channels from today, each promoting one of the regulator's [5-minute guides](#), which launched in November 2020. The guides provide simple, easy to understand information on all the governance basics trustees need to know. ...

The regulator's approach to the campaign is informed by [research into trustees' knowledge and awareness of their responsibilities](#), and into trustees' wider attitudes.

Paul Latham, Director of Communications and Policy at the Charity Commission, said:

The past year has been incredibly tough for charities. The pandemic has meant they are facing unprecedented challenges and trustees are making very difficult decisions, often at pace. In these uncertain times, we want to help trustees feel more confident they are getting things right. This campaign is aimed at new and experienced trustees alike – all

charities stand to gain from trustees who take active responsibility for acquiring and refreshing their knowledge of sound charity management. ...

**To read the full press release see**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-launches-campaign-to-help-charity-trustees-be-certain-in-uncertain-times>

## Scottish Government

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement - 9 March 2021**

... The other careful change that we feel able to make, at this stage, relates to places of worship.

I can confirm that, assuming no deterioration in the situation with the virus between now and then, we intend to allow communal worship to restart from Friday 26 March.

This is in time for Passover, Easter, Ramadan and Vaisakhi.

In addition, the limit on attendance at communal services will be increased from 20, which was the limit in place before lockdown, to 50 - assuming of course that a place of worship is spacious enough to accommodate that many people with 2 metre physical distancing.

Now I know that the restrictions on communal worship have been really difficult for many people, despite the exceptional, quite exceptional efforts made by faith groups to reach out to their communities.

This change is relatively minor, it is proportionate, which we believe can be achieved relatively safely, and which will hopefully enable more people to draw strength, comfort and inspiration from acts of collective worship. ...

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-update-first-ministers-statement-9-march-2021/>

## Welsh Government

### **Hate hurts Wales: campaign material**

*Videos portraying hate crime in Wales on grounds of religion, race, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender*

<https://gov.wales/hate-hurts-wales-campaign-material>

TOP

## Israel

### House of Commons Written Answers

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Israel: BBC Arabic Service**

**Bob Blackman (Conservative)** [159292] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the compatibility of the (a) editorial line taken by the BBC's Arabic service on matters relating to the state of Israel with (b) the Government's foreign policy objectives.

**Bob Blackman (Conservative)** [159293] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the accuracy of recent reports of bias by the BBC Arabic service in its reporting on Israel.

**James Cleverly:** We have made no such assessment. It is not for the government to make judgements about perceived impartiality or bias at the BBC, as the BBC is

operationally and editorially independent of government. This is a matter for the BBC Board and Ofcom, as the BBC's regulator. Ofcom is responsible for setting rules to ensure BBC coverage is impartial and accurate under the Broadcasting Code and for holding the BBC to account against its public purposes as the BBC regulator.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-26/159292>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-26/159293>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

#### **Occupied Territories: International Criminal Court**

**Andrew Percy (Conservative)** [158002] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions he has had with the International Criminal Court on that Court's determination that it has jurisdiction over East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

**Andrew Percy (Conservative)** [158003] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the effect on the Middle East peace process of the February 2021 International Criminal Court ruling on the situation of Palestine.

**James Cleverly:** We respect the independence of the ICC, and we expect it to exercise due prosecutorial and judicial discipline.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-24/158002>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-24/158003>

*The ruling referred to above can be read at*

[https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2021\\_01165.PDF](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](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](https://www.icc-cpi.int/RelatedRecords/CR2021_01166.PDF)

#### **Occupied Territories: International Court of Justice**

**Matthew Offord (Conservative)** [159294] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 18 February 2021 to Question 151690, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/295 on the International Criminal Court's determination that it has jurisdiction over East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

**James Cleverly:** The United Kingdom considers these to be two separate issues. The United Kingdom voted against General Assembly resolution 73/295 and we remain firmly of the view that the International Court of Justice and General Assembly are not the appropriate fora for resolving what is fundamentally a bilateral matter of disputed sovereignty between 2 UN member states. The resolution is non-binding.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-26/159294>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-09/151690>

*The ruling referred to above can be read at*

[https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2021\\_01165.PDF](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](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](https://www.icc-cpi.int/RelatedRecords/CR2021_01166.PDF)

UN Resolution 73/295, referred to above, can be read at <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/295>

*The following three questions both received the same answer, however, Craig Williams' question was answered by James Cleverly, and John Howell's questions by Nigel Adams*

### **UN Human Rights Council**

**Craig Williams (Conservative)** [159331] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether it is the Government's policy that permanent Agenda Item 7 at the United Nations Human Rights Council represents systematic institutional bias.

**John Howell (Conservative)** [162543] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what position the Government plans to take in the vote in the UN Human Right Council in relation to the Accountability resolution under Item 2 at the current UNHRC session.

### **Occupied Territories: Humanitarian Situation**

**John Howell (Conservative)** [162544] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the UK Government's policy is in regard to permanent Item 7 at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

**James Cleverly/Nigel Adams:** The UK has stood up for Israel when it faces bias and unreasonable criticism, and has been clear that the existence of a dedicated agenda item ('Item 7') damages the prospect for a two-state solution and does little to advance dialogue, stability or mutual understanding. As such, at the 40th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2019 we moved to voting against all resolutions under Item 7. However, the UN and its member states have every right to address issues of concern in a measured, balanced and proportionate way. We will continue to support scrutiny of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the Human Rights Council, so long as it is justified, proportionate, and not proposed under Item 7.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-03/162543>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-03/162544>

*The following two questions both received the same answer*

### **Gaza: Health Services**

**Rushanara Ali (Labour)** [159312] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help prevent the collapse of Gaza's healthcare system in the context of the occupied Palestinian territory's surge of covid-19 cases.

### **Gaza: Coronavirus**

**Rushanara Ali (Labour)** [159314] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to help tackle the gap in oxygen supply for covid-19 patients in Gaza.

**James Cleverly:** We have provided £1.25 million funding (the World Health Organisation with £630,000 and the United Nations Children's Fund with £620,000) to purchase and co-ordinate the delivery of medical equipment including personal protective equipment for over 4000 health workers and 15 oxygen concentrators, treat critical care patients, train frontline health workers and scale up laboratory testing capacity - mainly in Gaza.

The UK has also committed to equitable access to effective vaccines as demonstrated by our £548 million contribution to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) - the international initiative to support global equitable access to vaccines. We are pleased that the OPTs will be among the first to benefit from

the COVAX scheme with delivery of a first batch of more than 37,000 doses of the of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine anticipated shortly

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-26/159312>

and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-26/159314>

### **Gaza: Food Supply**

**Rushanara Ali (Labour)** [159313] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment his Department has made of the level of food insecurity in Gaza in the context of the covid-19 pandemic.

**James Cleverly:** The outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in OPTs has exacerbated the humanitarian and food insecurity situation. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, food insecurity, driven by high poverty and unemployment, affected 1.6 million Palestinians. Latest projections from the World Food Programme show an increase to 2 million Palestinians now food insecure - 40% of the population in OPTs.

To support the humanitarian situation in the OPTs, we are providing £2.5million to the World Food Programme to provide food and cash assistance to the most vulnerable Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza. We have also contributed £1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's Emergency Appeal in the OPTs which will help provide emergency food to over one million food-insecure refugees in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-26/159313>

## **House of Lords Written Answers**

### **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

**Lord Truscott (Independent Labour)** [HL11847] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the government of Israel's approach to administering COVID-19 vaccinations.

**Lord Bethell:** We have not made any formal assessment of the vaccine deployment outside the United Kingdom's own programme.

However, Ministers and officials continue to monitor vaccine deployment programmes across the world, including Israel's, and share learnings and collaborate internationally on the role of deploying safe, effective vaccines in response to COVID-19.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-06/hl11847>

### **Coronavirus: Vaccination**

**Lord Grade of Yarmouth (Conservative)** [HL12892] To ask Her Majesty's Government what lessons they have learnt from the government of Israel's campaign in response to COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in that country; and what steps they are taking to apply any such lessons to the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines in the UK.

**Lord Bethell:** The Department is regularly in discussions with other countries on a wide range of COVID-19 issues, including Israel, to share learnings and collaborate internationally on the vaccination programme. Feedback from these discussions, where relevant, is used to improve the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines in the United Kingdom.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-02/hl12892>

### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Correspondence**

**Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat)** [HL13510] To ask Her Majesty's Government

what steps they are taking in response to the letter from the Britain-Palestine All-Party Parliamentary Group to the Foreign Secretary on 8 February about the eviction of Palestinians in East Jerusalem by Israeli settler organisations.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We note the letter sent by the Britain-Palestine All-Party Parliamentary Group to the Foreign Secretary on 8 February. We regularly make clear our concerns about the evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem to the Israeli authorities and the Municipality of Jerusalem, both bilaterally and in co-operation with like-minded diplomatic partners. The Fourth Geneva Convention, which applies to all occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, prohibits demolitions or forced evictions absent military necessity. The Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa raised the issue of evictions of Palestinians from their homes, with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October 2020, and the British Embassy in Tel Aviv raises this issue regularly with the Israeli authorities. UK officials from the British Consulate in Jerusalem have made regular visits to areas at risk of demolition and eviction to reiterate UK support for those communities. On 25 November 2020, the UK Consul General Jerusalem visited families at risk of eviction in Sheikh Jarrah, restating UK opposition to evictions of Palestinians from their homes.

The UK is focused on preventing demolitions and evictions from happening in the first place through our legal aid programme, which supports Bedouin communities and Palestinians facing demolition or home eviction in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We continue to urge the Government of Israel to develop improved mechanisms for zoning, planning and permitting in Area C for the benefit of the Palestinian population, including by facilitating local Palestinian participation in such processes.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/hl13510>

#### **Israel: Palestinians**

**Lord Shinkwin (Conservative)** [HL13514] To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the President of the United States to support the resumption of direct talks between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The UK works closely with the US on matters relating to the Middle East Peace Process and we will continue to work closely with the US Administration, as we would normally do, on a variety of issues.

Only the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority can determine the needs and aspirations of their people. However, we have encouraged them to resume cooperation and work towards further dialogue. Peace will only come through negotiations between the parties, but international action has a role in facilitating progress. Meanwhile, the parties should do all they can to reverse the negative trends - including systematic settlement expansion and demolitions in the West Bank, violence and incitement, and the dire situation in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/hl13514>

#### **Palestinians: Coronavirus**

**Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat)** [HL13509] To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines ordered by the Palestinian Authority are not prevented from entering Gaza by the government of Israel.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** We welcome the steps that the parties have taken so far to coordinate responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the news that on the 17 February the first shipment of vaccines from the Palestinian Authority was brought into Gaza, with the approval of Israel. We encourage further cooperation between the two parties in this regard. Officials from our Embassy in Tel Aviv and our Consulate-General in Jerusalem regularly urge the Israeli and Palestinian

authorities to take steps to improve health and economic conditions in Gaza. We will continue to monitor the availability of vaccines for Palestinians in Gaza and will raise with the relevant authorities accordingly.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/hl13509>

## Welsh Assembly Oral Answer

### Public Procurement

**142 Darren Millar (Conservative):** Can I also, Trefnydd, call for a statement from you with your finance Minister hat on to provide and update to the Senedd on the development of a public procurement and advice note on the public contract regulations for discretionary grounds for consideration of excluding from public tenders? You'll be aware that we had some correspondence on this issue last year following your response to a written question which gave rise to concerns that the Welsh Government was planning on publishing a procurement advice note which would primarily impact the nation of Israel. I would be grateful if you could give us an advice update on this particular matter, because you did suggest in your last correspondence that you'd be making some final decisions on this in December. It's now March, and I think that people do deserve an update. ...

**Rebecca Evans (Minister for Finance and Trefnydd):** And as I said when we last discussed the procurement advice note, I have agreed to take further advice. We have had that advice now, which I'm still considering. But I will write to you shortly, in terms of the way forward. Thank you.

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/11183#C363069>

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## Foreign Affairs

### Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

#### **UN Human Rights Council 46: UK statement on freedom of religion and belief**

We remain deeply concerned about the scale of abuses and violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief: no one should suffer because of their conscience.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his work over the past five years, and look forward to engaging with him on his report on combatting anti-Muslim hatred, as well as on Christian persecution and other forms of discrimination.

The United Kingdom is home to many thriving religions and beliefs. We reject all forms of intolerance and hate. Internationally, we are concerned by the societal impacts of the pandemic including rising hate speech, misinformation and conspiracy theories which target minority faith communities in different countries.

We are also concerned about actions of governments such as Sri Lanka, where the government's mandatory cremation policy for those deceased due to Covid-19 has impacted Muslim and Christian minorities in particular. We hope this practice will soon cease and we are ready to provide technical support and evidence to counter misinformation.

This year, we will continue to assess the pandemic's impact on human rights.

What steps can we, the international community, take to ensure it does not fuel further global intolerance towards religious and belief minorities?

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-46-uk-statement-on-freedom-of-religion-and-belief>

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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>

Report Stage, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-08/debates/340A2BF5-B7C1-4F3E-91B6-48C31AB93791/DomesticAbuseBill>

#### **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

**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 11 May 2021)

[bit.ly/evensurvey](http://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