



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Contents

Home Affairs

Israel

Other Relevant Information

Relevant Legislation

Consultations

Back issues

Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Universities: Antisemitism

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [165688] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many universities have adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism; and what action is being taken against those universities that have not adopted that definition.

Michelle Donelan: The government has asked all English higher education providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. The IHRA definition is an important tool in tackling antisemitism. Adopting this widely recognised definition sends a strong signal that higher education providers take these issues seriously. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, wrote to higher education leaders, most recently in October 2020, to reiterate the importance of the definition and to urge all providers to consider adopting it.

The government is pleased to report that at least 91 providers have now adopted the definition, with many more preparing to adopt. The decision on adoption of the definition rests with individual providers, but the government will continue to urge them to adopt the definition, and ensure that higher education is a genuinely fulfilling and welcoming experience for everyone.

I am proud that so many providers have taken a positive step towards eradicating antisemitism by adopting the IHRA definition, but further progress is still needed to stamp it out. This is why, in the Secretary of State's most recent strategic guidance letter to the OfS, the government asked the OfS to undertake a scoping exercise, to identify providers which are reluctant to adopt the definition. The letter asked them to consider introducing mandatory reporting of antisemitic incident numbers by providers, with the aim of ensuring a robust evidence base, which the OfS can then use to effectively regulate in this area.

The Secretary of State also asked the OfS to ensure that, if antisemitic incidents do occur at a provider, they should consider if it is relevant in a particular case whether the provider has adopted the IHRA definition when considering what sanctions, including monetary penalties, would be appropriate to apply.

We will continue to work across government to ensure that racism and religious hatred of any kind is not tolerated anywhere, including in our world-leading universities.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-09/165688>

House of Lords Oral Answers

Racism

Lord Woolley of Woodford (Crossbench): To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March, what steps they are taking to tackle (1) institutional, and (2) structural, racism in the United Kingdom.

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, this Government campaigned on commitments to tackle prejudice, racism and discrimination. That is why the Prime Minister established the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities last July, to examine all aspects of continuing racial and ethnic disparities in Britain. The commission has focused on areas including education, employment, health and the criminal justice system. The commission is currently finalising its report; this will be submitted to the Prime Minister shortly.

Lord Woolley: My Lords, Covid-19 has had a devastating and disproportionate impact on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. This disease has laid bare and exacerbated racial structural inequalities. Does the Minister agree that, when the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities reports in a few days' time, it must include a Covid-19 race equality strategy, to comprehensively deal with inequalities in health, employment, education and housing?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, on 26 February we released a second report on the progress being made on tackling Covid-19 disparities experienced by individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds. I am sure this will be part of the outcomes of the commission that the Prime Minister will shortly receive.

Baroness Verma (Conservative): My Lords, given the spotlight put on the levels of racism still found across all levels of society—public, private, civil society and institutions—will the Government, following the review, also review their own processes across Whitehall in order to root out all barriers that prevent people of colour accessing the same opportunities as their white colleagues? There seems to be a gap between those coming in at entry level and at senior and middle management. Will my noble friend meet with me and others who understand these issues very well, as someone who has had personal experience herself, to help shift the dial?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My noble friend is correct, but the Government are campaigning on their commitments to tackle racism and discrimination. They are committed to increasing ethnic minority representation at senior levels within the Civil Service, across all government departments and their agencies. We have taken a number of clear steps in recent years that are already having a very positive impact. I am certainly very happy to discuss a meeting with my noble friend and the department.

Lord Hastings of Scarisbrick (Crossbench): My Lords, 22 years ago Sir William Macpherson declared the Metropolitan Police to be institutionally racist and the law was changed, but little has changed. The *Guardian* editorial today, in the light of Saturday's grossly over-the-top and aggressive use of police power against women, states: "The commissioner declared the service no longer institutionally racist, while a surge in stop and search has alienated many people of colour ... this weekend, many more women and men are questioning whom exactly the police serve."

Is it not time to abandon the unaccountable notion of operational independence and direct the police to abandon racist practices, notably stop and search?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, there was obviously, in the last few years, a large report on racism within the police. However, we will continue to work on this, and the commission will continue to look at what more we can do to ensure that all the systems—education, policing et cetera—have no racism in the future.

Lord Hendy (Labour): My Lords, the Office for National Statistics analysis in October 2020 showed that the ethnicity pay gap between white and ethnic minority employees has narrowed but persists, with marked regional variations. The largest is in London, at 23.8%, and the smallest is in Wales, at 1.4%. There are also gaps between ethnicities. Will the Minister consider amending legislation to impose a duty on employers to report the ethnicity pay gaps in parallel to those under Section 78 of the Equality Act 2010 in respect of the gender pay gap?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, the Government are already looking at this issue and will report in due course. However, the important thing to note is that because of the pandemic we look at unemployment among all the people of this country, and for that aim there has been a £30 billion investment in the Plan for Jobs, which obviously will include looking at the issues that ethnic minorities have in particular.

Baroness Hussein-Ece (Liberal Democrat): Institutional and structural racism is real and affects every aspect of black and minority ethnic people's lives. A recent report showed that black women are still four times more likely than white women to die in pregnancy or childbirth in the UK, and that 85% of black people are not confident that they would be treated the same as a white person by the police. The Government seem to be taking a rather piecemeal approach. Will they take their responsibilities seriously, bring forward a plan for a comprehensive race equality strategy and, in doing so, implement the outstanding recommendations of the reviews that they commissioned, such as the 2016 Lammy review and the 2017 Angiolini review into deaths in police custody?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, the race disparity unit has been supporting the Department of Health in driving positive actions in maternity services to improve, quite rightly, the outcomes for ethnic minority women, including the NHS Help Us Help You campaign. As I have said, the commission will bring all these issues together and we will look at moving that work forward on the back of all those reviews that we have had in the past, taking them all into account.

Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Labour): My noble friend Lady Lawrence's recent report exploring the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus crisis on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities concluded that the virus has both exposed structural racism in the UK and itself fuelled racism. It was not just a random case of above-average infection rates; it was a result of decades of social and economic inequalities and of structural injustice, inequality and discrimination. When do the Government intend to publish the delayed report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities that was submitted to the Prime Minister on 28 February?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: As I have said, the commission has one final meeting to finalise its report. After that, the report will go to the Prime Minister and then it will come back for us to look at its recommendations.

Baroness Deech (Crossbench): My Lords, David Baddiel's latest book is called *Jews Don't Count*. Bigotry against Jews and Israel is rampant in our universities, from the top of the administrations through the academics to the students, as evidenced by the Community Security Trust. The problem is institutional—for example, at Bristol University right now. The Universities UK report last November on racial harassment ignored it. Will the Minister make sure that the Office for Students uses its current consultation on harassment on campus to bring forward plans to address anti-Semitism?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: We certainly will, and I will take that back to the department on behalf of the noble Baroness.

Lord Taylor of Warwick (Non-affiliated): My Lords, in reality there is only one race: the

human race. What steps are the Government taking to address the fact that, for the first time in six years, there are currently no chairmen or chairwomen, chief executives or finance directors in the FTSE 100 from the black community?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, this issue is something that the Government have been working on with the private sector for a long time and will continue to do so, particularly on increasing the number of ethnic communities that are at the top of those organisations.

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Conservative): My Lords, will my noble friend commend the work done to combat racism and discrimination in football through Kick It Out campaigning? I know the Government are supportive. Will she lend support to the many clubs campaigning to end discrimination, such as my own club, Leicester City?

Baroness Scott of Bybrook: My Lords, I congratulate Leicester City on being third in the league and on their 5-0 win yesterday. My noble friend is right: racism or indeed any form of discrimination has no place in football or society, but there is still more to do. The Government continue to liaise closely with the football authorities to tackle this issue.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-15/debates/BC9E3706-4FF2-4097-BF21-116C9469495F/Racism>

The report on the progress being made on tackling Covid-19 disparities, referred to above, can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/second-quarterly-report-on-progress-to-address-covid-19-health-inequalities/second-quarterly-report-on-progress-to-address-covid-19-health-inequalities>

The Macpherson report, referred to above, can be read at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf

The Guardian editorial referred to above can be read at

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/14/the-guardian-view-on-the-met-and-protests-police-need-reform-not-more-power>

The Office for National Statistics analysis referred to above can be read at

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/ethnicitypaygapsingreatbritain/2019/pdf>

A short video introduction by David Baddiel to his book “Jews Don’t Count”, referred to above, can be watched at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4UKi3E30zI>

TOP

Israel

House of Lords Written Answers

Palestinians: Coronavirus

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL13754] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the responsibilities of the government of Israel in relation to the provision of COVID-19 vaccinations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; and what plans they have to make representations about this matter to the government of Israel.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK Ambassador in Tel Aviv raised the issue of vaccines with the Israeli Authorities on 24 February, encouraging the Government

of Israel to continue to facilitate the transfer of vaccines to the PA when required. The British Embassy in Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General in Jerusalem will continue to raise timely and appropriate access to COVID-19 vaccines and medical equipment.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-01/hl13754>

Gaza: Offshore Industry

Lord Hylton (Crossbench) [HL13755] To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Palestinian Investment Fund, Consolidated Contractors Company and the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company on the development of off-shore gas near Gaza; and what plans they have to contribute UK (1) technical expertise, and (2) funding, to this endeavour.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: This issue is being discussed with the parties at international level in the context of how to facilitate a sustainable and long-term solution to the energy crisis in Gaza.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-01/hl13755>

West Bank: Schools

Baroness Sheehan (Liberal Democrat) [HL13769] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 8 February (HL12565), what steps they intend to take to prevent the destruction of schools and other infrastructure in the West Bank.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: The UK continues to oppose Israel's proposed demolitions of Palestinian schools and calls on Israel to reconsider its plans to do so. The UK Ambassador in Tel Aviv raised ongoing demolitions with the Israeli Authorities in a meeting alongside like-minded partners on 25 February 2021. The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa called on Israel to stop demolitions on 5 February 2021 and raised his concerns about demolitions of Palestinian infrastructure, including the potential demolition of schools, with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 29 October 2020. The UK is clear that in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, demolitions are contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-01/hl13769>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-25/hl12565>

The Minister's call to stop demolitions referred to above, can be read at

<https://twitter.com/JamesCleverly/status/1357723513940045824>

TOP

Other Relevant Information

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Says a Treaty Is Needed to Regulate Hate Speech in Social Media, with a Focus on Hate against Minorities

... Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues, said hate speech in social media was spreading and increasing. As the Secretary-General had said, the world faced a veritable tsunami of hatred and xenophobia. The thematic report focused on hate speech, social media and minorities. "And we at the United Nations and in many countries

may be failing in not naming and tackling this evil”, he said. Where disaggregated data was available on hate speech in social media or on hate crimes, approximately 70 per cent or more of those targeted tended to belong to minorities. The Holocaust did not start with the gas chambers, it started with hate speech against a minority. Dehumanising language, even reducing minorities to pests, normalised violence against them and made their persecution and eventual elimination acceptable. The three levels of a State’s international legal obligations in relation to hate speech were to criminalise the severest forms of hate speech, to prohibit other less ‘severe’ forms, and to take other measures to counter other forms that even though not as severe, still needed to be tackled in light of the possible harm that prejudice, racism and intolerance could cause to society at large. ... A treaty was needed to regulate hate speech in social media, and this must in particular focus on the most prevalent and harmful forms of hate – and that was hate against minorities. ... Other speakers warned that freedom of expression must not be used as a pretext for hate speech. ... COVID-19 had only intensified the effects of online hate speech on minorities, particularly with regards to Islamophobia. There could be no denying the importance of social networks during the pandemic - but the outbreak of an epidemic of hate was concerning ... Moreover, social media companies had to be held accountable for their role in inciting violence and hate speech against minorities on their platforms. ... Fernand de Varennes noted that policies that acknowledged and addressed the main targets and victims of hate speech, such as those that specifically addressed anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-gypsyism, were the most effective. ... Given that there was no universally accepted definition of hate speech, a sound regulatory framework was critical. Such a legal framework should enable administrative and judicial authorities to reconcile freedom of expression with the respect for human dignity. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26900&LangID=E>

Minority Issues: the widespread targeting of minorities through hate speech in social media

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Documents/A_HRC_46_57.docx

TOP

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/2021-03-15/debates/4ECEFBDB-E347-4F76-8DFF-604EFC5A618B/DomesticAbuseBill>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2021-03-15/debates/2DB5363F-1D41-4E5A-B2E2-3CA3A2D5A28B/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>

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

<https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/post-mortem-examinations-defence-time-limit-scotland-bill>

[TOP](#)

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

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

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

[TOP](#)