



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Written Answer

Churches: Financial Support

Jim Shannon (DUP) [29041] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what financial support the Government has provided to churches during the covid-19 outbreak.

Eddie Hughes: The Government recognises the impact the pandemic has had on the finances of our places of worship and religious groups.

As part of the response to the impact of Covid-19, the Government made available a package of support specifically for charities and businesses. Places of worship that are registered charities have been able to apply to a number of these schemes on the basis of being impacted organisations themselves, and for their work delivering community services in response to the pandemic. This included the Government's £750 million package of support specifically for charities, social enterprises and the voluntary sector.

The Government continues to engage regularly with a range of faith leaders and community groups - including through our Places of Worship Taskforce and regular roundtable meetings with major faith groups - to better understand how the Government can support them to respond to the pressures they face at this time.

I encourage places of worship and community groups to monitor the Government's web pages that offer information on the schemes currently available, and new schemes when they are launched, such as:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/financial-support-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-vcse-organisations-to-respond-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-07-07/29041>

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Updated guidance for the safe use of places of worship
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

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House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Coronavirus

Patrick Grady (SNP) [29829] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if the Government will provide covid-19 vaccines to the Palestinian Authority from supplies surplus to UK needs.

James Cleverly: The UK is committed to global 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 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) were among the first to benefit from the COVAX scheme with its first delivery on 17 March 2021. Since that initial shipment, we are pleased that several further deliveries have arrived in the OPTs, including most recently on 2 June 2021.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-07-08/29829>

Occupied Territories: Coronavirus

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [29926] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has had recent discussions with the (a) Israeli Ambassador and (b) Palestinian Consulate on the provision of covid-19 vaccines to people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

James Cleverly: The British Embassy Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General Jerusalem are in regular contact with the relevant parties and continue to raise the issue of timely access to vaccines. The Foreign Secretary most recently raised this during his visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 26 May. The UK is committed to global 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 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) were among the first to benefit from the COVAX scheme with its first delivery on 17 March 2021. Since that initial shipment, we are pleased that several further deliveries have arrived in the OPTs, including most recently on 2 June 2021.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-07-08/29926>

Israel: Palestinians

Fleur Anderson (Labour) [29927] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Israeli Ambassador and (b) Palestinian Ambassador on (i) equitable access to covid-19 vaccines and (ii) protecting human and children's rights in that region.

James Cleverly: The British Embassy Tel Aviv and the British Consulate-General Jerusalem are in regular contact with the relevant parties and continue to raise the issue of timely access to vaccines. The Foreign Secretary most recently raised this during his visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 26 May.

The UK continues to engage with the Israeli government on human rights issues in the context of the occupation, including the treatment of children. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation. 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.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-07-08/29927>

Gaza: Israel

Margaret Ferrier (Independent) [30365] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps he has taken to ensure (a) an investigation into and (b) accountability for potential violations of international law in the context of Israel's May 2021 military offensive on Gaza.

James Cleverly: Israel has a legitimate right to self-defence, and the right to defend its citizens from attack. In doing so, it is vital that Israel ensures its actions are proportionate, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and that it makes every effort to avoid civilian casualties. We repeatedly call on Israel to abide by its obligations under international law and have a regular dialogue with Israel on legal issues relating to the occupation, including raising concern about Israel's actions when warranted.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-07-09/30365>

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Other Relevant Information

Court of Justice of the European Union

A prohibition on wearing any visible form of expression of political, philosophical or religious beliefs in the workplace may be justified by the employer's need to present a neutral image towards customers or to prevent social disputes

However, that justification must correspond to a genuine need on the part of the employer and, in reconciling the rights and interests at issue, the national courts may take into account the specific context of their Member State and, in particular, more favourable national provisions on the protection of freedom of religion

IX and MJ, who are employed in companies governed by German law as a special needs carer and a sales assistant and cashier respectively, wore an Islamic headscarf at their respective workplaces.

Taking the view that the wearing of such a headscarf did not correspond to the policy of political, philosophical and religious neutrality pursued with regard to parents, children and third parties, IX's employer, WABE eV asked her to remove that headscarf and, following her refusal, temporarily suspended her from her duties on two occasions and gave her a warning. MJ's employer, MH Müller Handels GmbH, following her refusal to remove that headscarf at her workplace, first transferred her to another post in which she could wear that headscarf and then, after sending her home, instructed her to attend her workplace without conspicuous, large-sized signs of any political, philosophical or religious beliefs. ... the Court notes that the wearing of signs or clothing to manifest religion or belief is covered by the 'freedom of thought, conscience and religion'. ...

Furthermore, the Court recalls its case-law according to which such a rule does not constitute direct discrimination provided that it covers any manifestation of such beliefs without distinction and treats all workers of the undertaking in the same way by requiring

them, in a general and undifferentiated way, to dress neutrally, which precludes the wearing of such signs. ...

In the present case, the rule at issue appears to have been applied in a general and undifferentiated way, since the employer concerned also required an employee wearing a religious cross to remove that sign. The Court concludes that, in those circumstances, a rule such as that at issue in the main proceedings does not constitute, with regard to workers who observe certain clothing rules based on religious precepts, direct discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. ...

... the Court notes, first of all, that an employer's desire to display, in relations with customers, a policy of political, philosophical or religious neutrality may be regarded as a legitimate aim. The Court states, however, that that mere desire is not sufficient, as such, to justify objectively a difference of treatment indirectly based on religion or belief, since such a justification can be regarded as being objective only where there is a genuine need on the part of that employer. The relevant elements for identifying such a need are, inter alia, the rights and legitimate wishes of customers or users and, more specifically, as regards education, parents' wish to have their children supervised by persons who do not manifest their religion or belief when they are in contact with the children. ...

... a policy of neutrality within an undertaking may constitute a legitimate objective and must meet a genuine need on the part of the undertaking, such as the prevention of social conflicts or the presentation of a neutral image of the employer vis-à-vis customers, in order to justify objectively a difference in treatment indirectly based on religion or belief. ...

... the Court holds that ... account must be taken of the various rights and freedoms in question and that it is for the national courts, having regard to all the material in the file in question, to take into account the interests involved in the case and to limit the restrictions on the freedoms concerned to what is strictly necessary. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2021-07/cp210128en.pdf>

To read the full judgement see

<https://tinyurl.com/yessbkvtv>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

**** Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2867>

Notice of amendments

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/42245/documents/556>

Assisted Dying Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2875>

Charities Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2877>

Education (16 to 19 Academies) (Religious Character) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2946>

Education (Assemblies) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2878>

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862>

Israel Arms Trade (Prohibition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3025>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3017>

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2900>

Nationality and Borders Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3023>

Online Safety Bill (Draft)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-online-safety-bill>

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2942>

Northern Ireland Assembly

Organ and Tissue Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2017-2022-mandate/primary-legislation---bills-2017---2022-mandate/organ-and-tissue-donation-deemed-consent-bill/>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Animal welfare [EU legislation] (closing date 3 August 2021)

https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12950-Animal-welfare-revision-of-EU-legislation_en

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