



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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Westminster Hall Debate

Online Abuse

col 249WH Catherine McKinnell (Labour): ... Online abuse is not something that just affects people in the public eye; it is something that most of us have at least witnessed, if not been subjected to ourselves. Ofcom's pilot online harms survey in 2020-21 found that over a four-week period, 13% of respondents had experienced trolling, 10% offensive or upsetting language, and 9% hate speech or threats of violence. It is not an unfortunate side-effect of social media that victims can just shrug off. Although the abuse takes place online, we know that it can have a significant and devastating impact on the lives of victims offline. ...

Sadly, distressing accounts of fear, isolation, difficulty sleeping, anxiety and depression are alarmingly familiar for people who are targeted for online abuse and harassment. However, the abuse is not directed equally, and the online world does not stand apart from real-world inequalities. Our inquiry found that women, disabled people, those from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds are not only disproportionately targeted for abuse; often it is their very identities that are attacked. ...

We heard not only that incidents of antisemitic abuse have increased, but that Jewish women are disproportionately singled out for abuse. Similarly, although women are generally subjected to more online bullying than men are, ethnicity further influences a woman's vulnerability. Amnesty International's research suggests that black women are around 84% more likely than white women to be abused online. In this way, online abuse can reflect and amplify the inequalities that exist offline. It also reinforces marginalisation, discouraging the participation of such communities in online spaces. ...

col 250WH The related issues of online anonymity and identification of users also emerged as important and controversial issues ... The evidence we heard on the role of anonymity in facilitating abuse was mixed. Danny Stone of the Antisemitism Policy Trust, with whom I have worked closely as chair of the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism, told us that the ability to post anonymously enables abusive behaviour and pointed to research demonstrating disinhibition effects from anonymity that can lead to increased

hateful behaviour. Danny cited a figure suggesting that 40% of online antisemitic incidents over the course of a month originated from anonymous accounts. ...

Allowing users to post anonymously always entails a risk. We recommend that online platforms should be required to specifically evaluate the links between anonymity and abusive content on their platforms, in order to consider what steps should be taken in response to it. ...

col 252WH The Law Commission also recently concluded a review of hate crime law. It acknowledges two points highlighted in the Petitions Committee's 2019 report: the unequal treatment of protected characteristics in hate crime law, and the failure to classify abuse of disabled people as a hate crime in cases where the offence may have been motivated by a sense that disabled people are easy targets, rather than being clearly motivated by hostility to disabled people.

The commission recommended extending existing aggravated hate crime offences to cover all characteristics currently protected under hate crime law, and reforming the motivation test for an offence to be treated as a hate crime, proposing an alternate test of motivation on the grounds of "hostility or prejudice". The Government have stated that hate crime offences will be listed in the draft Online Safety Bill as priority illegal content. That means that the legislation will require platforms to take steps to proactively prevent users from encountering hate crime content. ...

col 253WH Although we talk a lot about Twitter, Facebook and TikTok in these discussions, abusive content hosted on smaller platforms also plays a significant role in encouraging prejudicial attitudes and real-world harm. Some of these platforms have become safe havens for some of the most troubling material available online, including holocaust denial, terrorist propaganda films and covid-19 disinformation. From an internet browser today, anyone can easily access videos that show graphic footage of real-world violence and allege the attacks are part of a Jewish plot, or find an entire channel dedicated to the idea that black people are a biological weapon designed to wipe out western civilisation—I could go on. Danny Stone of the Antisemitism Policy Trust told the Committee: "It is not just the Twitters and Facebooks of this world; there are a range of harms occurring across a range of different platforms. It is sinister, we have a problem and, at the moment, it is completely unregulated. Something needs to be done." ...

col 255WH **Damian Collins (Conservative):** ... I chaired the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill—the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee. We had consistent evidence from people about the nature of the abuse they had faced online, and how that abuse creates spaces online where not only are people targeted, but hate speech, racist speech, vile abuse and extremism have become normalised within the echo chambers of certain sectors of social media. ...

At the heart of the Bill is something simple: activity that is illegal offline should be regulated online, and the laws that Parliament has created and that our courts enforce offline should be applied online as well. Offences are committed not just by someone who is abusing another person, but by a platform that actively hosts, amplifies and creates an audience for that content, and platforms should be liable to combat abuse. Indeed, without that liability, we will not be able to combat it. ...

col 256WH One of the concerns was whether equalities legislation was enforceable online—how would we enforce race hate, and other abuse, online? The Government have made clear how that could be done. However, it would be better if the regulatory regime was based on offences named in the Bill, rather than our having an additional general definition of something that is "legal but harmful". ...

col 259WH **Siobhan Baillie (Conservative):** ... Not all abuse is anonymous—I know that because I get quite a lot of it myself—but the most frightening threats are often from faceless, nameless and cowardly perpetrators, who prevent us from being able to assess and understand the true risk of a post because we do not know who is behind it. ...

col 260WH Briefly, we know that anonymity and lack of verification mean less self-policing,

because users feel less accountable and responsible for their actions. We know that there is less actual policing because it is so difficult to trace people who are anonymous, and the preventive and protective measures can often be dodged—if we block or ban an abusive user on a platform, they just start a new account ...

col 264WH The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Philp): ... Although the online world presents enormous opportunities for communication, research and better understanding one another, there is no question but that, ... in many areas of enormous concern people are suffering terrible abuse that affects their day-to-day lives in the most awful and unimaginable ways. More than that, on occasion, people are subjected to abuse that is straightforwardly illegal and deserves criminal prosecution....

col 265WH The draft Online Safety Bill is the principal vehicle through which action will be taken. ... significant changes will be made to the Bill on introduction. It will be very different, in a number of significant ways, when it is introduced very shortly, compared with the draft version published last May. ...

Whether or not the illegal act or illegal thing is a priority item, there will be a duty to take action where any illegal activity occurs online. Critically, that particular duty applies to all platforms, regardless of size, so even the smaller ones that are not category 1 will have to take action—proactive action for priority illegal harms, and retrospective action for everything else that is illegal. ...

col 267WH The Bill will do more to tackle abuse, whether it is perpetrated by those who are anonymous or those who are not, because ... much of the abuse is not anonymous. Shamefully, much of it is done in people's own name, so that needs to be tackled as well. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-02-28/debates/1368BEBE-4B60-4247-B0E2-48D9B8A84472/OnlineAbuse>

The Petitions Committee report referred to above can be read at

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/8669/documents/89002/default/>

The report of the Law Commission review, referred to above, can be read at

<https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lawcom-prod-storage-11jsxou24uy7q/uploads/2021/12/Hate-crime-report-accessible.pdf>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel and Pakistan: Nuclear Weapons

Martyn Day (SNP) [125319] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the strength of (a) Pakistan's and (b) Israel's nuclear arsenal.

James Cleverly: Pakistan and Israel are not party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and as such they are not bound by the legally binding obligations of the NPT. Pakistan has developed a nuclear weapons programme and Israel has never declared a nuclear weapons programme. The UK Government continues to encourage both countries to sign the NPT as Non-Nuclear Weapon States. We continue to monitor all global nuclear developments and will continue to work with international partners to strengthen the non-proliferation regime and advance multilateral nuclear disarmament.

Israel: Palestinians

Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrat) [125518] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps her Department has taken to assess the validity of reports from Amnesty International and others suggesting that the Government of Israel used Pegasus spyware against Palestinian NGOs.

Amanda Milling: We do not comment on the use of Pegasus against individuals. The National Cyber Strategy was published in December 2021 and sets out the UK's commitment to countering the proliferation of high-end cyber capabilities. We will continue to work with international partners to achieve this.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-02-18/125518>

Israel: Bedouin

Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrat) [126825] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions she has had with the government of Israel on the clashes between Israeli police and Bedouin protesters over afforestation activities in the Negev desert.

Amanda Milling: We continue to follow the debate around the issue of unresolved Bedouin land claims, unrecognised Bedouin villages in the Negev and lack of basic services. We continue to encourage the Israeli authorities and Bedouin communities to engage in dialogue to agree a satisfactory solution to the issue, respecting the rights of the people affected.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-02-21/126825>

Amal Nakhleh

Daisy Cooper (Liberal Democrat) [126826] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the government of Israel on the detention Amal Nakhleh.

Amanda Milling: Officials from the British Embassy Tel Aviv raised Amal Nakhleh's case with the Israeli Ministry of Justice on 27 January. We continue to call on the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law and either charge or release detainees.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-02-21/126826>

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Other Relevant Information

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issues a new General Policy Recommendation to Council of Europe member states

... In its new Recommendation, ECRI underlined that Muslims are part and parcel of Europe's diversity, to which they have contributed for centuries, and recalled that collective action was needed to build inclusive societies that bring communities and individuals closer together and ensure equal dignity and mutual respect through shared democratic values.

ECRI noted with concern in recent years that anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice have often been prevalent in society, dispersing across institutional, political, social and economic life. ECRI therefore decided to provide comprehensive guidance to governments on how to

address anti-Muslim racism and discrimination in four specific areas: i) policies and institutional coordination, ii) prevention, iii) protection, and iv) prosecution and law enforcement.

... ECRI underlines that governments should give a high priority to the fight against anti-Muslim racism, through relevant action plans, any necessary legislative measures or review, and where appropriate by appointing coordinators and setting up dedicated independent monitoring groups or committees.

ECRI considers that governments should also place particular emphasis on prevention. ... Furthermore, governments should take the necessary measures to eliminate discrimination against Muslims in access to education and in employment, including by paying increased attention to the situation of Muslim women. There is also a need for promoting learning about the diversity of Muslim life and Muslim history and the positive contribution of Muslim persons, communities, and culture to European societies. ...

... ECRI recommends that anti-Muslim crimes committed online are punished just as crimes offline and are adequately addressed by means of effective prosecution and other measures. Illegal anti-Muslim hate speech must also be removed promptly and consistently by internet service providers, in accordance with the relevant legal and non-legal framework. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/-/the-european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance-ecri-issues-a-new-general-policy-recommendation-to-the-47-council-of-europe-member-stat-1>

ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 5 (revised) on preventing and combating anti-Muslim racism and discrimination

<https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-5-revised-on-preventing-and-comb/1680a59e53>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

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

Assisted Dying Bill

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

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>

Report Stage, House of Lords

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-02-28/debates/DB808D67-CC61-45F1-8D46-B14B42CBB2E9/NationalityAndBordersBill>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-02-28/debates/9E3FFDBD-1AE6-4A6B-8944-78F833B01C71/NationalityAndBordersBill>

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

**** closes in 7 days**

Human Rights Act Reform: A Modern Bill of Rights (closing date 8 March 2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/human-rights-act-reform-a-modern-bill-of-rights>

Hate Crime Legislation in Northern Ireland (closing date 28 March 2022)

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-hate-crime-legislation-northern-ireland>

Trade with Israel (closing date 30 March 2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/trade-with-israel-call-for-input>

CPS: Public interest guidance for suicide pact and 'mercy killing' type cases

(closing date 9 April 2022)

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/consultation/consultation-public-interest-guidance-suicide-pact-and-mercy-killing-type-cases-0>

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