



Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

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House of Commons Oral Answer

Prime Minister's Questions

Andrew Percy (Conservative): ... We have recently heard from Jewish students who are suffering record antisemitic attacks on university campuses, including allegations of their work being marked down by their own professors. This is completely outrageous, and one would expect the National Union of Students to be on their side, but instead of helping the students it has been inviting somebody who is engaged in antisemitic conspiracy theories—a rapper—to a conference. Will the Prime Minister do everything in his power to ensure that campuses are a safe place for British Jewish students?

The Prime Minister: Our universities have, for far too long, been tolerant of casual or indeed systematic antisemitism. I hope that everybody understands the need for change—for rapid and irreversible change—but it is also important that we have an antisemitism taskforce devoted to rooting out antisemitism in education at all levels.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-03-23/debates/8B11C5F0-031D-42D1-A0DA-B9C3362A015C/Engagements#contribution-305D2898-F932-4918-8772-E71A5617BFF2>

House of Commons Written Answers

Antisemitism: Hate Crime

Barry Sheerman (Labour Co-op) [141139] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment her Department has made of the effect of the rise of anti-Semitic hate crime on the safety of Jewish people.

Rachel Maclean: Antisemitism must be understood for what it is - an attack on the identity of people who live, contribute and are valued in our society. There can be no excuses for antisemitism or any other form of racism or prejudice.

In 2020/21, 22% of religious hate crimes were targeted at Jewish people, or those perceived to be Jewish - 1288 reported incidents, up from 1205 the previous year.

In April 2021, the Home Secretary confirmed the continuation of the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant for 2021-22. This grant of £14m continues to provide for protective security measures at all Jewish state, free and independent schools, colleges, nurseries and some other Jewish community sites, including a number of synagogues.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-16/141139>

Police: Training

Barry Sheerman (Labour Co-op) [141138] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what training is provided to police officers on tackling antisemitism.

Kit Malthouse: This Government is clear that antisemitism has absolutely no place in our society.

The College of Policing provide police officers with training on how to respond to hate crime and incidents during initial learning and investigation training. This training targets the wider policing response to all forms of hate crime. Further training on tackling hate crime is subsequently provided for detectives, senior investigators, and supervisors. Local training is the responsibility of individual chief officers, according to policing needs and priorities.

The National Police Chiefs' Council has a strategic partnership with the Community Security Trust - a charity that protects British Jews from antisemitism and related threats - and has held many joint events to raise awareness of the needs of the Jewish community and to highlight the nature of contemporary antisemitism.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-16/141138>

Police: Training

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op) [140545] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many police forces have undertaken cultural competency training; and what plans her Department has to ensure that that training is rolled out across all forces.

Kit Malthouse: Police forces that reflect and understand the communities they serve are crucial to tackling crime and maintaining public trust and confidence in a modern diverse society. More than ever, diversity is an important part of operational effectiveness. This includes provision of appropriate training for all officers and staff and ensuring the very highest professional standards are maintained throughout their careers.

The College of Policing, who set and maintain training standards for policing, published the Code of Ethics in 2014, which includes equality and diversity among the standards of professional behaviour in the police. The Code is currently being refreshed. The College's foundation training for all those entering the service already includes substantial coverage of police ethics and self-understanding. The initial training undertaken by all officers also covers hate crimes, ethics and equalities, and policing without bias.

In addition, we have funded the College to develop a National Police Leadership Centre to create a strong professional framework and standards across policing at all levels. As part of this, the new curriculum for Sergeants includes a module on 'Inclusive Leadership', covering organisational and procedural justice, including historical context.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-15/140545>

Females: Safety

Anneliese Dodds (Labour Co-op) [140546] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what programmes her Department has undertaken to improve street safety for Jewish women; when those programmes took place; and what assessment she has made of their success.

Kit Malthouse: The Government takes the safety of all women and girls very seriously. We are determined to ensure that women feel safe everywhere - at home, at work, at school, online, or on the streets.

In 2021/22, the Government is providing £25 million for round 3 of the Safer Streets Fund, which focuses on improving public safety for all, with an emphasis on women and girls' safety in public spaces. Successful projects have taken forward a range of innovative and traditional crime prevention measures, including training designed to challenge attitudes towards VAWG and change behaviour, as well as improvements to CCTV and streetlighting.

Evaluation of the programme is currently ongoing.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-15/140546>

Senedd Debate

Religious buildings

199 Mike Hedges (Labour): ... Members cannot have failed to notice the continuing closure of religious buildings, including churches and chapels ...

200 Many who do not attend the chapels or churches of Wales attach a huge significance to their architectural merit and the status they carry within their communities. ...

201 As you look around Wales, it is obvious that, in this day and age, Wales now has a huge excess of chapels and churches for its current religious needs. What we have seen in response to this overprovision is the closure of many, in an attempt to not only save money, but also to save some of the really magnificent buildings of the same denomination.

202 The upkeep of these remarkable buildings has fallen on the shoulders of the remaining members of the congregation, most of whom vary from the elderly to the very elderly. As one deacon said to me, 'We inherited this chapel from our parents, but our children do not want to inherit it from us.' ...

203 We have witnessed former chapels being sympathetically adapted or converted for a number of different uses, ranging from flats, which are the most common, to houses, businesses, restaurants, offices, community centres, and, in some cases, converted to places of worship for other religions. Unfortunately, others have become derelict, burned down, or have fallen down. ...

209 Now it is mainly the larger churches and chapels that remain. They cannot easily be converted into flats or offices as the smaller ones were. Most are listed ...

210 Cadw listing buildings is not the answer, and sometimes it's part of the problem, in that you cannot make changes to the building, it will sit there until it falls down or is burned down, and far too many buildings end up being burned down when they're left empty for long periods of time. ...

214 Can I also ask for a national museum for our religious history? We've got a wool museum, an industrial and maritime museum, we've got a slate museum. I just think that we ought to be having a museum to carry on and show our religious history, because, although it's been a living history for many of us, in 50 years' time, it won't be the living history for the people then. So, please can I urge the Government to think of that? ...

216 Sam Rowlands (Conservative): ... Religious buildings are often the heart of communities, and, at times, bring all parts of our community together. Even for non-believers, faith is what many people reach out to in times of need, and it's often these buildings that symbolise the importance of this faith and the support that faith has to offer.

217 As someone who has been brought up through church, as the son of a church minister, I know that, whilst these buildings are merely structures to hold the church, the significance is beyond bricks and mortar—it's what they represent. It's these buildings that so often hold important family and community memories of celebration, memories of grief, and

every emotion in between. It's these buildings that so often have been the gathering place through generations, the support in dark times and good times, and I argue they'll need to be in place for future generations too. ...

230 Rhys ab Owen (Plaid Cymru): ... Places of worship have made an immeasurable contribution to Welsh life: they taught thousands of children to read and write; they fostered the strongest possible sense of community; they provided an essential platform for Welsh culture; they often campaigned for workers' rights and provided welfare services when government offered next to nothing. ...

236 Two years ago, all of the places of worship closed their doors due to COVID, and for many of them their doors never reopened. ...

239 Alun Davies (Labour): ... We talk about our chapels and our churches, but we can also talk about our synagogues, mosques and temples, a part of the tapestry of who we are. And when I think about our religious history, I also, like others here today, think about our social history, our cultural history. ...

243 ... the heritage centre that is being built in Merthyr, from the synagogue, speaks about the history of the Jewish community in the south Wales Valleys. And I think we still have to come to terms with parts of our history, and certainly the anti-Jewish riots in Tredegar at the beginning of the last century are something that we haven't come to terms with yet today. I think, in the way that we protect the bricks and mortar, what we have to do is to translate that into the present as well and into who we are as a people and who we want to be as a nation. ...

246 Joel James (Conservative): ... As we remove our places of worship, we are unintentionally signalling that our loss of religiosity is a good thing, which in my mind is a sad state of affairs, because it normalises the view that our spirituality and connection to a higher power are no longer relevant. ...

248 I believe that, whilst communities may have moved away from worshipping in these buildings, and so their original use has faded, we should not be so ready to allow their destruction, because there's no doubt in my mind that communities still want and would welcome them being saved and repurposed, still serving the community in the spirit in which they were built. I would also argue that organisations that own these religious buildings would welcome their reuse rather than their demolition and would be willing to offer their help and services to do so in one way or another. ...

252 Delyth Jewell (Plaid Cymru): ... These buildings—the point has been made—are more than masonry; they're cathedrals of our collective memory, our connection to our past ... If buildings like this were lost, how much of our history would be buried with them?

253 These buildings are not only important to our past. They play a central role in community life as hubs for coffee mornings, bazaars, collection points, foodbanks. Throughout COVID-19, chapels, churches, synagogues, mosques, gurdwaras and temples have been used for outreach, connecting members of the community, organising food runs, Zoom choirs, buddy schemes. They offer a lifeline for residents of all faiths and none. ...

254 Lots of dioceses and lots of congregations do rely on donations from the people who go and are associated with their congregations, and this will be true of all faiths. But, because of the pandemic, fewer people attend services or mass or prayer. They aren't there to put the money in the basket. What more certainty can the Government, I wonder, give to religious communities in Wales that their buildings can be not just protected, but strengthened and supported? ...

264 Mabon ap Gwynfor (Plaid Cymru): ... But we mustn't forget, too, that these buildings weren't constructed solely for religious purposes, but deliberately as community assets ... Indeed, if you read the articles of establishment for a few of these chapels, they mention religious purposes, but also political and social purposes, specifically with large political meetings, very often, held in these chapels, with assemblies and concerts, too. They were

buildings that were focal points for the community, and they were multipurpose buildings, so it's right that we discuss how to take on these buildings and repurpose them for alternative uses today. ...

267 Dawn Bowden (Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport, and Chief Whip): ... we all have these buildings, don't we, in our constituencies. Alun Davies referred to the synagogue in Merthyr Tydfil, which is going to be repurposed to become the Welsh Jewish heritage centre for the whole of Wales. ...

268 Places of worship are absolutely embedded in the heritage of every community in Wales ... collectively they contain more history than perhaps any other type of building that we see every day. There are no less than 3,000 places of worship listed in Wales, a powerful acknowledgement of both their architectural and historic significance. Many have not met the criteria for statutory listing at a national level, but they are of course still very important at a local level.

269 The community connections that have sustained all of those buildings over centuries are sadly wearing very thin in many areas. I absolutely agree that it is vital for Welsh Government to work with different denominations to discuss the future of these buildings. ... It's also vital that we are imaginative and work with a range of other partners to find a sustainable future for these precious buildings that restores them to their place at the heart of our communities. ...

272 Places of worship are also being encouraged to investigate ways in which they can open their doors for community use, alongside their original purpose. ... Now, while opening the doors to meet local community needs is important, it won't necessarily provide sufficient income to help keep the roof on. However, places of worship can reach out to a much wider community to help sustain those buildings. For instance, there's a growing interest in faith tourism, and we're beginning to see some imaginative new ideas to realise its potential, including bookable experiences and themed trails promoted by Visit Wales and the National Churches Trust.

273 In exceptional cases, redundant religious buildings may be maintained largely unaltered by trusts specifically set up for that purpose. ...

Members may be aware that, in 2015, the Welsh Government, through Cadw, published a strategic action plan for places of worship in Wales. The focus of the plan was on people and communities using, enjoying and looking after historic places of worship, and foremost of its actions was setting up a places of worship forum to share information and best practice and review ongoing needs. ...

276 But I am very taken with Mike Hedges's suggestion that we could explore the possibility of such an empty church building, or chapel building, being used as a national museum for religion. ...

277 Now, I'm under no illusion about the scale of the challenge. But when I survey the initiatives that are already under way, and I see the energy and the commitment that's dedicated to meeting this challenge, I believe that many of the elements that will help us re-establish the vital link between buildings and community are already in place. ...

To read the full transcript see

<https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/12660#A71208>

The Action Plan referred to above can be read at

<https://cadw.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2019-05/29012016CadwHistoricPlacesOfWorship-en.pdf>

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UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Israel's 55-year occupation of Palestinian Territory is apartheid – UN human rights expert

A UN expert called today on the international community to accept and adopt the findings in his current report, echoing recent findings by Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights organisations, that apartheid is being practiced by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory.

“There is today in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 a deeply discriminatory dual legal and political system that privileges the 700,000 Israeli Jewish settlers living in the 300 illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank,” said Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

“Living in the same geographic space, but separated by walls, checkpoints, roads and an entrenched military presence, are more than three million Palestinians, who are without rights, living under an oppressive rule of institutional discrimination and without a path to a genuine Palestinian state that the world has long promised is their right.

“Another two million Palestinians live in Gaza, described regularly as an ‘open-air prison’, without adequate access to power, water or health, with a collapsing economy and with no ability to freely travel to the rest of Palestine or the outside world.”

The Special Rapporteur said that a political regime which so intentionally and clearly prioritizes fundamental political, legal and social rights to one group over another within the same geographic unit on the basis of one’s racial-national-ethnic identity satisfies the international legal definition of apartheid.

“Apartheid is not, sadly, a phenomenon confined to the history books on southern Africa,” he said in his report to the Human Rights Council. “The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court came into law after the collapse of the old South Africa. It is a forward-looking legal instrument which prohibits apartheid as a crime against humanity today and into the future, wherever it may exist.”

Lynk said that Israel’s military rule in the occupied Palestinian territory has been deliberately built with the intention of enduring facts on the ground – primarily through settlements and barricades – to demographically engineer a permanent, and illegal, Israeli sovereign claim over occupied territory, while confining Palestinians in smaller and more confined reserves of disconnected land.

This has been accomplished in part through a long-standing series of inhuman(e) acts by the Israeli military towards the Palestinians that have been integral to the occupation, he said. He pointed to arbitrary and extra-judicial killings, torture, the denial of fundamental rights, an abysmal rate of child deaths, collective punishment, an abusive military court system, periods of intensive Israeli military violence in Gaza and home demolitions.

Lynk said a number of recent reports and opinions issued by respected Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights organizations have come to the same conclusion on the practice of apartheid by Israel. He added that leading international personalities – including former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor and former Israeli Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair – have also all called this apartheid.

The Special Rapporteur said the international community bears much responsibility for this present state of affairs. “For more than 40 years, the UN Security Council and General Assembly have stated in hundreds of resolutions that Israel’s annexation of occupied territory is unlawful, its construction of hundreds of Jewish settlements are illegal, and its denial of Palestinian self-determination breaches international law,” he said.

“The Council and the Assembly have repeatedly criticized Israel for defying their

resolutions. They have threatened consequences. But no accountability has ever followed. If the international community had truly acted on its resolutions 40 or 30 years ago, we would not be talking about apartheid today.”

To end the practice of apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territory, the Special Rapporteur called on the international community to assemble an imaginative and vigorous menu of accountability measures to bring the Israeli occupation and its apartheid practices in the occupied Palestinian territory to a complete end.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/israels-55-year-occupation-palestinian-territory-apartheid-un-human-rights>

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A_HRC_49_87_AdvanceUneditedVersion.docx

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Foreign Affairs

House of Commons Written Answer

Middle East: Christianity

Andrew Rosindell (Conservative) [143591] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether her Department is taking steps to support Christians in the Middle East.

Amanda Milling: The UK is committed to defending freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all, and promoting respect between different religious and non-religious communities. Bilaterally, Ministers and officials regularly raise specific cases of concern, and do not shy away from challenging those we believe are not meeting their obligations. Multilaterally, we work with the UN, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe, G7 and other fora to promote FoRB. In addition to our bilateral and multilateral action, we will host an international Ministerial conference on 5-6 July 2022, in London. The UK-hosted International Ministerial Conference on FoRB will drive forward international efforts on this agenda and demonstrate the UK's leading role in supporting freedom and openness. This conference will allow us to use our global influence to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief for all internationally.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-03-21/143591>

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Other Relevant Information

Vibrant Scottish Mosques

Hear My Voice

https://www.vibrantscottishmosques.com/uploads/2/6/8/5/26859197/hear_my_voice_-_full_report.pdf

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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>

House of Lords Library Briefing

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/marriage-and-civil-partnership-minimum-age-bill/>

Nationality and Borders Bill

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

Online Safety Bill

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

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 3 days**

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