Home Affairs

See also the House of Commons debate on “Iran” which appears in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

Andrew Percy (Conservative): Happy new year, Madam Deputy Speaker. This morning, the report into antisemitism in the National Union of Students was published. It is a damning indictment of the failure by that organisation to tackle anti-Jewish racism. Will the Leader of the House urge the NUS to get its act together on this issue, and will she find time for a debate on antisemitism on our campuses?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important and timely matter. As someone who was a representative in the NUS, I know that this issue has plagued that organisation for many, many years. I hope that, having published the report, it will actually do something about it. I am sure that any debate applied for on this matter, whether through the Backbench Business Committee or other means, would be extremely well attended.


The report referred to above can be read at


Topical Questions: Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Philip Davies (Conservative) [902970] Some people particularly want to buy halal and kosher meat, and some people particularly want to avoid doing so. Is it not time to properly label all these products appropriately, so that consumers, whether they want to buy this or do not want to buy it, can make an informed decision?
The Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries (Mark Spencer): The Government have committed to consult on mandatory labelling reforms this year. We want to make it easier for consumers to purchase products aligned with their values. As part of the consultation, we will seek views on labelling products that conform with religious requirements, such as those that are halal and kosher.

https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-12/debates/1FB5BE68-81B3-4214-942A-DE748C900962/TopicalQuestions#contribution-A12C234D-F606-4E40-9225-A8E796DF8246

House of Commons Written Answers

Sikhs

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [114758] To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities, whether the Government has sought legal advice on whether (a) public bodies and (b) decision makers fail in their equality duty if they are unable to establish the number of people who they employ or to whom they provide a service that have a Sikh ethnicity.

Stuart Andrew: The specific duties of the public sector equality duty apply to most public bodies in England, such as local authorities and schools; most public authorities operating across Great Britain, such as Government departments (except on devolved functions); and a small number of public bodies operating across one of the borders inside Great Britain. These duties also apply to decision-makers who are not public authorities but exercise public functions. Public bodies subject to the specific duties must publish information to show their compliance with the public sector equality duty. The information must include:

- information relating to people who are affected by the public body’s policies and practices, such as service users, and who share protected characteristics;
- and for public bodies with 150 or more employees, information relating to those of the public body’s employees who share protected characteristics.

The specific duties are intended to enable better performance of the public sector equality duty, but there is no requirement to hold or publish information to any particular level of detail. Similarly, there is no prescribed format. It is up to each public body to decide for itself what information it publishes. This will vary greatly depending on the size of the body, the range of functions it performs, and the extent to which those functions could affect equality.

However, public bodies and decision-makers who think that their decisions may affect discrimination, harassment, or victimisation of Sikhs, affect equality of opportunity between Sikhs and people of different ethnicity, or affect Sikhs’ relations with people of different ethnicity, should ensure that their compliance with the duty includes considerations of Sikh ethnicity.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-12-20/114758

Sikhs

Preet Kaur Gill (Labour Co-op) [114792] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, with reference to the Sikh Names Research Report published by the Office for National Statistics as part of its December 2018 update on research and testing of 2021 Census questions and topics, whether he plans to hold discussions with the National Statistician on the potential merits of conducting a further research exercise using names to produce an estimate of the number of people identifying as Sikh who may not have been recorded as Sikhs in the 2021 census because they (a) did not answer the optional religion question or (b) stated in answer to that question that they had no religion.

Jeremy Quin: The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. …
The census religion question measures religious affiliation; this is a measure of how a person connects or identifies with a religion, regardless of whether they practice or have belief in it.

Due to the subjective and self-identified nature of the religion question, it is not possible to know how someone who chose not to answer the question may have described their religious identity. Similarly, it is not possible to know how someone who answered “No religion” on the census would have answered if required to identify with a religion.

As set out in my response to your recent written questions (PQ 98820 and 98821), bespoke analysis will be carried out in relation to Sikh populations, using responses to the religion and ethnic group questions in combination. This will provide insights into the number of people who: identified as “Sikh” on the religion question alone; identified with “Sikh” as part of their ethnic group alone; or identified with both in combination. This will enable us to provide official estimates on how people who identified as “Sikh” within their ethnic group described their religion including those who did not answer the voluntary religion question and those who stated that they had no religion.

The Sikh names research report you refer to was conducted for exploratory purposes only. There are a number of caveats and assumptions relating to this research that mean the methods cannot be used to produce an official estimate of people who might be part of a wider Sikh community but who did not answer “Sikh” to the religion question. For example, the method is based on assumptions about the strength of association between surname and religious affiliation and that this is the same for responders as it is for non-responders to the religion question; this assumption is untested so cannot be used to produce an official estimate.

Following our other recent correspondence, I hope that a meeting between you and senior colleagues in the ONS will take place soon. This will provide an opportunity to discuss our planned analysis from Census 2021 data and for us to also use this as an opportunity to further understand the needs and requirements around data collection and population estimates for the Sikh community.

1 The Religion report can be found in this ‘ethnic group, language and religion question development’ publication: https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/nationalidentityethnicgrouplanguageandreligionquestiondevelopmentforcensus2021#research-and-development-timelin

2 https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-11-29/98820


Further information on question development can also be found here: https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/nationalidentityethnicgrouplanguageandreligionquestiondevelopmentforcensus2021#annex-1-census-commitments-made-on-the-topics-of-national-identity-ethnic-group-religion-and-language


The report referred to above can be read at https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/2021censustopicresearchupdatedecember2018#annex-5-sikh-names-research-report-2018

The answers referred to above can be read at https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-11-29/98820 and https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2022-11-29/98821
Scottish Parliament Motion

Jackson Carlaw (Conservative) [S6M-07474] Farewell Service for Newton Mearns Synagogue – That the Parliament acknowledges that a farewell service for the Newton Mearns Synagogue in Eastwood is to take place on 22 January 2023; notes that services will no longer take place at the Synagogue after a merger took place between the Newton Mearns and Giffnock Synagogues last year to form a single community; understands that the merger has established the Giffnock Newton Mearns Synagogue (GNMS) and that it will be based at the Giffnock site on Fenwick Road; further understands that the farewell service marks the end of an era for members of the local Jewish community in Eastwood and the start of an exciting new chapter with the Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis set to attend the event; acknowledges that the Newton Mearns Synagogue has been a fixture in the local area for decades, and wishes the recently established Giffnock Newton Mearns Synagogue every success for the future.

https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-07474

Holocaust

See also the House of Commons debate on “Iran” which appears in the Foreign Affairs section below.

House of Commons Oral Answers

Business of the House

Ian Mearns (Labour): …  A little note to make is that Thursday 26 January … is the date we propose for the debate on Holocaust Memorial Day, which, of course, follows on 27 January. …


Scottish Parliament Motion

Fergus Ewing (SNP) [S6M-07477] – Holocaust Memorial Day 2023 – That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the importance of continuing to impart the lessons of the Holocaust to each generation; considers that the Holocaust was the systematic attempt by a genocidal regime in Europe to murder all Jewish people on the continent between the years 1941 and 1945, with six million men, women and children tragically losing their lives; notes that the annual Holocaust Memorial Day will be held on 27 January 2023, and that the chosen theme for this year’s event is “ordinary people”; recognises that this particular theme has been chosen to highlight the ordinary people who were involved in all elements of, not just the Holocaust, but later genocides including in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur; acknowledges that, to better understand ordinary people, the theme has been subdivided into five categories: perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, witnesses and crucially, victims; further acknowledges that, according to the theme, particular groups of people do not always belong to just one of the categories, with railway workers cited as an example where some in this job at the time of the Holocaust are considered as perpetrators, for driving trains to concentration camps, and others as...
rescuers, for hiding Jewish people; understands that the theme can be widened to include ordinary locations and sites, including schools and hospitals, as such buildings can be used to perpetrate genocide; notes that the theme also highlights that there are extraordinary individuals in all genocides, including those who were part of what it considers remarkable efforts to rescue and save the lives of people targeted by murderous regimes, and believes that underpinning the theme is the powerful narrative that everyone living today is an ordinary person, who is able to be extraordinary in their actions through making the choice to challenge prejudice, stand up against hatred, and speak out against identity-based persecution.
https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-07477

**Israel**

*See also the House of Commons debate on “Iran” which appears in the Foreign Affairs section below.*

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

**Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon** Toured East Jerusalem with Jerusalem expert @DanielSeidemann who provided fascinating insights to the history of the City as well the impact of proposed settlements including E1. The City of peace and its sacred religious importance for Judaism, Christianity and Islam is key.
https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1613850041311002624

**Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon** Discussed humanitarian & development support in the OPTs with @WFP, @UNICEFpalestine, @UNinPalestine, @ICRC, @UNRWA . All were clear that a political solution to the conflict is important to improve service provision, including education, for all communities.
https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1613794294610935808

**Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon** Valuable meeting with [Palestinian flag] PM Shtayyeh in Ramallah. We discussed the UK’s [British flag] commitment to the two state solution & support for Palestinian Authority; the need for parliamentary elections; & the importance of communication between Israelis and Palestinians at all levels.
https://twitter.com/tariqahmadbt/status/1613598617746702336

**United Nations**

**Greater Acceptance, Participation in International Court of Justice’s Compulsory Jurisdiction Key for Improving Global Dispute Settlement, Security Council Hears** … António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that the cornerstone of the rule of law is that all people, institutions and entities — including the State itself — are accountable before the law. “From the smallest village to the global stage, the rule of law is all that stands between peace and stability and a brutal struggle for power and resources,” he emphasized. It protects the vulnerable; prevents discrimination, harassment and other abuses; is the first line of defence against atrocity crimes; creates and bolsters trust in institutions; supports fair, inclusive economies and societies; and is the basis of international cooperation and multilateralism. …
Noting that 2022 was a deadly year for both Palestinians and Israelis, he condemned all unlawful killings and extremist acts and said that Israeli settlement-expansion, home demolitions and evictions are driving anger and despair. …

Against that backdrop, he stressed that these examples illustrate that adherence to the rule of law is “more important than ever”. … Noting that the Court occupies a special place with its unique mandate, he called on all Member States to accept the Court’s compulsory jurisdiction. …

Joan E. Donoghue, President of the International Court of Justice … noted, there is broad agreement that the concept of the rule of law is not easily transposed from the national to the international level. This is especially obvious when one considers the role of adjudication in advancing the rule of law. At the national level, one well-recognized aspect of the rule of law is the constraint placed on what has been called the authority of the State by the operation of a judiciary. But, she pointed out, States can avoid compulsory and binding international dispute settlement by withholding consent to jurisdiction. As a result, international adjudication is far less robust than adjudication by independent national courts. …

Mahmoud Daifallah Hmoud (Jordan) … said the right of peoples to self-determination is constantly being undermined. States remain reluctant to voluntarily submit their disputes to peaceful dispute-settlement mechanisms, while perpetrators of international crimes are escaping accountability. “Some of those who call for respect to the principles and purposes of the Charter somehow forget such principles, including the right to self-determination, when it comes to the Palestinian question,” he said, adding that conquest, which has its roots in the era of colonialism, is the premise of Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. …

Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, said at the heart of the international law order lie two cardinal principles: the right of people to self-determination and the inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force. Palestine exemplifies the violation of these two principles, he said, declaring: “Aggression, annexation and apartheid are under way in Palestine as we speak.” They deserve this Council’s immediate attention and action. All the Council members recognize that international law is being violated in Palestine. “Does the role of this Council end with the diagnosis or its role is to address the illness once it is diagnosed?” he asked. The rule of law cannot coexist with impunity. Every State that spoke at the Council today stressed the importance of accountability, he said, asking: “What illegal action was Israel held accountable for? The forced displacement of Palestinians? The unlawful annexation of Jerusalem? The building of settlements? The unlawful killing of Palestinians, including children? The mass arbitrary arrest of Palestinians, alive and dead? The inhumane and illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip? The demolition of homes?” It is no surprise then that Israel continues to choose colonial occupation over peace, he said, warning that double standards constitute an attack against the credibility of international law. Israel has attacked the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, United Nations independent experts and commissions, the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, he said, noting that “without deterrence, one must expect recurrence of crimes”. …

Amir Saeid Jali Iravani (Iran) said … In the Middle East, the Council has not acted to address the ongoing atrocities and human rights violations committed by the Israeli regime in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including its continued violations of United Nations resolutions and international law. …

Iran

**Bob Blackmand (Conservative):** … The IRGC has created, funded and armed a vast network of middle eastern terrorist groups, from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthi in Yemen, all spreading war and violence around the region. Iran has supplied Hezbollah alone with some 150,000 missiles, which are regularly fired at innocent Israeli civilians. Hezbollah’s 2012 bomb attack in Bulgaria, which killed five Israeli tourists and a Bulgarian, led the EU to list the organisation’s military wing as terrorists, while leaving the political arm of the organisation untouched. In creating that artificial distinction, which even Hezbollah rejected, the EU avoided banning the group in its entirety. It consequently continues to recruit and fundraise in EU member states and the UK, which has not yet banned the group separately.

Furthermore, the IRGC and Hezbollah are at the forefront of Iran’s brutal campaign to keep the Syrian Assad regime in power. Since 2015, when Russia joined the fighting, the two regimes have partnered in despicable war crimes that have killed hundreds of thousands and left millions as refugees of war. The growing alliance with Russia has been further strengthened with the current war in Ukraine, with Iran supplying advanced drones to Russia since August. …

**Alicia Kearns (Conservative):** … Is the Iranian regime bringing forward the death sentence because it wants to prove its point that it is not the Iranian people who are rising up organically against a cruel, evil and repressive regime, but the UK, the US, the west, the Israelis and all those awful people forcing a fake revolution in that country? Iran could be doing it to make that point.…

**Terrorism** is a tactic that we know states use, and it is in its most devastating form when states pursue it. The enduring policy of the UK Government has been to treat terrorism by states as falling outside the Terrorism Act 2000, but that appears to be a policy position rather than an interpretation of the Act, which I suggest gives us some room for manoeuvre. …

There is no authoritative ruling by the courts on whether state terrorism can be included within the Terrorism Act. However, the High Court suggested in 2006 that, although the Act’s words were, “taken by themselves, broad enough to cover all lawful acts of war,” it was a “misconception of the definition” for acts by some states to fall within it. The effect of proscribing the IRGC would be to accept, contrary to our long-standing policy position, that state forces and therefore states can be “concerned in terrorism” under the Terrorism Act 2000. That requires great consideration, because when a state force uses or threatens violence, it normally complies with the laws of war, known as international humanitarian law. We would therefore have to say that the activities of the IRGC fall outside the definition of terrorism.

Now, I suggest that the House is probably united in believing that the IRGC’s actions fall outside international humanitarian law. It follows that, if the IRGC were proscribed on the basis that its violence amounted to terrorism, the argument would be that acts of violence carried out by friendly state forces—any European partner could be named—are not terrorism because they are carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law. I recognise that Ministers may be receiving all sorts of complex legal guidance from civil servants, but it has been a policy decision, not a legal decision, so far not to proscribe. Although there are profound implications of that decision, state forces are capable of being “concerned in terrorism”, so the question is more how the definition of terrorism applies to other state forces. …

**Iran** has now turned Syria into a drug superstate, with class A drugs—especially
things such as fentanyl—produced en masse. Those will make their way to British shores. They may only be in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and neighbouring countries at the moment, but they will come to Britain ... In Lebanon, Iran is destabilising en masse. We have cholera outbreaks and all sorts of appalling fragilities in that country that should not be there. Hezbollah and Hamas continue to be stood up by Iran. ...

**col 746 Matthew Offord (Conservative):** ... On 16 November, there was an Iranian-made drone attack against a tanker off the coast of Oman. The vessel was Liberian-flagged, Singaporean-owned and commissioned by an Israeli business. In response to my written question, the Foreign Office said: “We remain committed to assuring the safety of shipping in the Middle East region, including through the Gulf of Oman. The UK is a member of the International Maritime Security Construct, along with several Gulf partners, which addresses the threat in the region by providing reassurance to commercial shipping and deterring further threats.” That is a pretty weak response. ...

**col 760 Jim Shannon (DUP):** ... I think of the religious minorities who face entrenched discrimination, violence and systemic, crippling exclusion, including Baha’is—I have spoken to two Baha’i women who face a second 10-year prison sentence just for being Baha’is, which the hon. Member for Harrow East referred to as well—and Christians, Jews and Sunni Muslims, who suffer discrimination under law and in practice. Baha’is are subject to particular hostility from the Iranian regime, suffering from arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, the destruction of homes and even cemeteries ... and prohibition from higher education. ...

**col 762 Christian Wakeford (Labour):** ... This is not just about Iran’s treatment of its own people. Iran has destabilised the region for numerous years in how it treats the Kurds and in its approach to Israel and the entire middle east. More recently, it has provided attack drones for Russia’s illegal war in Ukraine. We have also seen the Iranian regime take a negative approach not only to the state of Israel but to Jewish people across the globe, by propagating antisemitism, including holocaust denial. As we approach Holocaust Memorial Day, it is now more important than ever to call out the evil of holocaust denial. In recent years, we have seen high-profile competitions such as the international holocaust cartoon competition being held in Iran with the Iranian Government’s support. The most recent competition was held in 2016, according to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and it had 150 entries, all depicting holocaust denial and claims of holocaust hoaxes. The competition tries to denigrate one of the worst crimes against humanity the world has ever seen. Despite the denial of Iran’s Foreign Minister, the holocaust cartoon competition is linked to the Iranian regime, as confirmed by Iran’s Ministry of Culture. Conflicting statements are a recurring theme of the Iranian regime, which produces different messages for domestic and overseas consumption. Iran has been designated a state sponsor of terrorism. It funds Hamas, Hezbollah and numerous regimes across the middle east, including in Lebanon and, as the Chairman of the Select Committee said, Syria. We need to continue calling this out, because Iran’s support for terrorism is a global threat, particularly to Jewish communities, which have been repeatedly targeted. The most notable example is the 1994 Hezbollah bombing of the Asociación MutualIsraelita Argentina building in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people and injured hundreds. This continued threat is a major reason why Jewish communities around the world, including in my constituency, require security outside schools, synagogues, community centres and events. In 2012, Iran or Hezbollah was connected to incidents targeting Jewish communities or Israeli interests in India, Georgia, Thailand, Singapore, Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kenya and this country. This continued threat is a major reason why Jewish communities around the world fear for their safety, and it is why we need organisations such as the
Community Security Trust to make sure that our Jewish constituents and friends are safe. Again, I pay tribute to the Community Security Trust’s work to keep my constituents safe to go about their daily lives.

col 763 The UK should continue to monitor the global and domestic threat from Iranian-backed terrorism and take action to limit terrorists’ ability to operate domestically, regionally and globally. The Government should be commended for supporting the security of the UK’s Jewish communities against this threat. The Government took far too long to proscribe Hezbollah, compared with other countries, but we need to have further conversations with the EU and our neighbours and friends to make sure they are also proscribing Hezbollah in its entirety. …

col 768 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty): … On the issue of proscription, the IRGC is, of course, sanctioned as an organisation and its individual members are sanctioned under our current legislation, but it is not proscribed as a terrorist organisation. It would be wrong of me to speculate from the Dispatch Box about the outcome of the Government’s current consideration of this issue, which is active, and it would be wrong of me to pre-empt any formal announcement or judgment by the Government. However, I can say that the calls from right across the House and the unity with which those calls have been made will be noted by the Government. This is something that we regard as extremely serious, and the Government will make the judgment as they see fit. …

John Spellar (Labour): Many of us have been round this block before with the artificial distinction between the military and non-military wings of Hezbollah. Eventually, the Government had to give way, which was the sensible thing to do. Can the Minister not cut to the chase and follow the United States, which has already proscribed the IRGC, and actually deal with this appalling organisation, which is a threat not only to its own citizens, but to stability in the middle east and in wider north Africa as well?

Leo Docherty: We note the approach of the United States, and that will be taken into consideration when the Government form their view and make an announcement. …

To read the full transcript see https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-12/debates/8B0B0A39-4FF0-4EFF-960D-8D3A51F0ED79/Iran

Relevant Legislation  ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Bill of Rights Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3227

Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3186

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2862

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3325
Online Safety Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137

Palestine Statehood (Recognition) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3217

Private Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3188

Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3163

Schools Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

Consultations ** new or updated today

** closes in 7 days
Assisted dying/assisted suicide (closing date 20 January 2023)

** NUS UK Antisemitism Action Plan (closing date 27 January 2023)