Home Affairs

House of Lords Written Answer

Schools: Christianity

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (Non-affiliated) [HL8106] To ask His Majesty's Government whether they encourage Christian teaching in schools.

Baroness Barran: The government’s policy is to allow religious education (RE) curricula to be designed at a local level, whether that is through a locally agreed syllabus or by individual schools and academy trusts developing their own curricula. The government does not specify what the content of a school's RE curriculum should be, nor does it actively promote the teaching of any particular religion. Legislation does include the following requirement: a locally agreed syllabus must 'reflect that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'. This requirement is replicated in the funding agreements that academies have with the Secretary of State for Education. Exceptions to this include schools and academies with a religious designation, who are permitted by legislation and funding agreements to provide an RE curriculum in accordance with their trust deeds and tenets of their faith.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-24/hl8106

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Letter from the Secretary of State to the Board of Deputies of British Jews: Response to the Board of Deputies of British Jews regarding concerns about allegations of antisemitism at performances by Roger Waters

Dear Marie,

Thank you for your letter of 15 May regarding your concerns about Roger Waters’ upcoming This Is Not A Drill Tour.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-24/hl8106
It is unacceptable that Jews in the UK continue to encounter antisemitism. The work that you and the Board of Deputies do is invaluable; I just wish that it was not necessary. We will continue to support efforts to build friendly, working relationships between people of different faiths and to promote tolerance and understanding.

The Government firmly believes that antisemitism is abhorrent and has absolutely no place in civilised society. We appointed Lord Mann as an Independent Adviser on Antisemitism and are considering his recommendations. We also recently increased the Jewish Community Protective Security Grant administered by the CST to £15m, and the Home Secretary announced a new UK Jewish Community Police, Crime and Security Taskforce to ensure we are doing all we can to prevent and respond to antisemitism. Tackling the evil of antisemitism in all its forms is a government priority and we firmly believe that people of all religions and beliefs should feel safe and able to continue their practices freely.

My officials have investigated the ownership of the O2 Arena, which you reference in your letter, and I can confirm that this is not owned by HM Government or our agents. The Government is clear that everyone has a fundamental right to freedom of speech and artistic expression, so long as they remain within the boundaries set by law. There is also a societal expectation placed on people with a significant public profile to behave responsibly and not abuse their platform. This is an expectation of which Roger Waters is reportedly falling short.

The UK has some of the strongest legislation in the world to tackle hate crime, and if you feel anything that Roger Waters says or does crosses the line into that which is unlawful, this should of course be reported to the Police.

I am of course happy to discuss this further, if you would like. I hope we can continue to work closely together to fight antisemitism.

With every good wish,
Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Minister for Intergovernmental Relations


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Israel

See the Westminster Hall debate on “Iran” that is included in the Foreign Affairs section below.

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Foreign Affairs

Westminster Hall Debate

Iran

col 327WH Brendan Clarke-Smith (Conservative): …We need to be frank about the nuclear programme: Iran has never been closer to developing a nuclear weapon, and the JCPOA has comprehensively failed to halt Iran’s nuclear advances. Iran has been overtly breaching the JCPOA since May 2019, and even produced uranium enriched to a purity of 83.7%, which is a small technical step from the 90% threshold required for a nuclear
weapon. The country has accumulated enough uranium enriched to 20% and 60% purity that it could produce at least two nuclear bombs within months. …

col 328WH Iran has the largest and most diverse ballistic missile capability in the middle east. In defiance of UN resolutions it has continued to develop and test advanced missiles capable of delivering a nuclear payload over thousands of miles. …

col 330WH The regime’s appalling treatment of its own citizens speaks volumes. We must act, as an ongoing warning that the Republic cannot be trusted and must not be treated as an equal in any sort of negotiations. … The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is Iran’s foremost practitioner of human rights abuses, and it is deeply regrettable that we have not acted decisively against the organisation by proscribing it in its entirety. We must be unambiguous. All of Iran’s malign activity is underwritten by the IRGC and its elite Quds Force. It is directly instigating conflicts around the world through its funding, arming and training of countless terror groups, many of which are proscribed in the UK for very good reason. …

col 331WH The UK should show its commitment to rooting out Iran’s support for terrorism by proscribing the IRGC and leading essential international efforts to end its financing of terror surrogates. There is clearly support for this landmark step within Government, and I particularly applaud the Minister for Security, who has done so much to raise public awareness of the dangers of IRGC activity within the UK. I also note that the Prime Minister has previously said that IRGC proscription “must now be on the table”, and he vowed unequivocally in December last year that he would utilise “the full range of tools at our disposal to protect UK citizens from the threat of the IRGC”. …

col 332WH John Cryer (Labour): … let us be clear what we are dealing with: the clerical fascists and homicidal maniacs who run Iran, and their monstrous servants in the IRGC, are effectively the modern-day version of the Nazis. If they had been around in 1939, they would have been advocating declaring war, but they would have been on the other side, not the side of the allies. They want to wipe Israel off the face of the planet, they want to murder Jewish people and gay men and women, and they want to take women as a whole back to the stone age. They are doing their best to do that not only in Iran, but elsewhere. That repellent view of the world also applies to Tehran’s proxies. We are dealing not just with Hezbollah and Hamas, as bad as they are, but with … criminal gangs …

Gavin Williamson (Conservative): Does the hon. Gentleman think that there are certain similarities with the reluctance to proscribe the political wing of Hezbollah? There is a lot of political will to make that proscription happen, but there seems to be a reluctance within the FCDO. …

John Cryer: That is probably true. The rationale is normally that elements at the heart of Government say, “We still have to talk to these people.” Well, actually, they do not need to communicate with them. We are talking about Nazi terrorists, not a rational organisation. …

col 333WH John Howell (Conservative): … Iran’s state-endorsed summary executions and the ever-tightening screw on the rights of women and girls point to crimes against humanity. Tehran even recognises that its treatment of women and girls diverges significantly from the freedoms that women enjoy in the west, which Iran’s Supreme Leader declared in 2017 to be a “Zionist plot to destroy human community”. …

The buck for all this stops with President Ebrahim Raisi and Supreme Leader Khamenei. What good are sanctions if the regime’s two most powerful despot are exempt? The Government must prove to ordinary Iranians that we are prepared to hold their tyrants accountable through targeted and personal sanctions. That is the only way we can fulfil our commitment to fundamental human rights …

Sarah Green (Liberal Democrat): … The crackdown that followed the death of Mahsa Amini has seen brutality against women and girls taken to new levels, including
the possible use of gas poisonings by the regime to intimidate female students and to force schools to shut. …

col 336WH Andrew Gwynne (Labour): … The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a branch of the Iranian military, has never been more powerful. Indeed, it is perhaps an understatement to refer to the IRGC as a branch; Reuters has called it an industrial empire … The IRGC has been linked to terror attacks, hostage takings, assassinations, human rights violations and the intimidation of journalists and critics across the globe, including here in the United Kingdom. From Yemen to Lebanon, from Iraq to Israel, and from Syria to Saudi Arabia, Iran has waged an ideological war against peace and stability … The IRGC provides financial support to several terrorist groups, including Hezbollah, Hamas and the Taliban. …

The point is that the involvement of the IRGC in other terrorist groups, particularly in the middle east, is to further Iranian foreign policy goals. It is a major barrier to peace across the middle east, including to a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The IRGC’s commander, General Hossein Salami, has stated his intention to erase Israel from the global political map, something that is particularly concerning given the creation of IRGC proxy-controlled territory in Syria and Lebanon. Despite calls across the House, and despite the serious threat that the IRGC poses domestically and internationally, the British Government have so far resisted calls to proscribe it as a terrorist organisation. …

col 341WH Chris Law (SNP): … For the past 44 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has operated a regime of oppression, internally and externally. As that oppression continues and even escalates, it is important that the UK Government proactively challenge the threat that Iran poses domestically and internationally, the British Government have so far resisted calls to proscribe it as a terrorist organisation. …

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, said: “The weaponisation of criminal procedures to punish people for exercising their basic rights—such as those participating in or organising demonstrations—amounts to state sanctioned killing.” …

Protests are quelled through violence, murder and arrest … Every day, the regime inflicts on its citizens arbitrary detention and killing, torture, denial of freedom of assembly and expression, gender-based violence, and discrimination against and persecution of minorities.

The Iranian regime and its security apparatus commit grave human rights violations daily, and that is not simply limited to the territory of Iran … The preamble to the constitution of the Islamic Republic states that “the Constitution provides the … basis for … the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad.”

Iran has ambitions to be the dominant regional force in the middle east, and since the 1980s it has provided support for the Hezbollah armed group in Lebanon and the Assad regime in Syria. In recent decades, Iran has supported Shi’a militias in Iraq, especially following the 2003 US-led invasion, and has backed a Houthi group in the ongoing conflict in Yemen. The regime also has a history of providing missiles to Hamas in the Gaza strip. …

col 345WH Catherine West (Labour): … Iran poses an increasing military threat at home and abroad. … In the March refresh of the integrated review, the UK Government restated their aim to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, but there are deep concerns that the failure to restore the joint comprehensive plan of action and the stalling of talks since September 2022 may mean that Iran soon makes irreversible nuclear progress, rendering previous commitments meaningless.

Looking at the middle east and Iran’s role in the region more widely, we continue to be concerned about the regime’s support for terror groups and militias, as seen in its threats against Israel and its continued military involvement in Syria and elsewhere. …

col 349WH The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development
Office (Andrew Mitchell): … I want to emphasise that Iran’s reprehensible behaviour has escalated in recent months. … its human rights record is appalling, with surging use of the death penalty, increased restrictions on women, intensified persecution of religious minorities and the further erosion of media and civic freedoms. The regime has brutally cracked down on protesters and made repeated attempts to target people outside Iran. … since January 2022 we have identified more than 15 credible threats to the lives of UK-based individuals, orchestrated by the Iranian regime. …

Over the past 18 months, we have seen the regime orchestrate multiple credible threats to the lives of those living in the UK, including towards media organisations and journalists. We will always stand up to such behaviour from foreign nations, because our priority is the safety and security of the UK and those who live here. …

col 350WH We take very seriously the threatening behaviour of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Not only have we sanctioned the organisation in its entirety, but we have sanctioned 29 individuals and entities affiliated with it since last October. That includes the Basij force—the arm of the IRGC that is mobilised to enforce brutal repression on the streets of Iran—and, most recently, four commanders under whose leadership IRGC forces have opened fire on arbitrarily detained and tortured protesters. …

The regime’s wider destabilising activity is rampant. It includes support for a number of militant groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria … militias in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen. …

Meanwhile, Iran’s nuclear programme has never been more advanced. Iran refused to seize the critical opportunity to sign the revised joint comprehensive plan of action in August last year, making demands outside the scope of the agreement. The International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly highlighted Iran’s lack of co-operation with long-running investigations into undeclared material. Iran’s malign activity has made the diplomatic context even more challenging, but we remain committed to ensuring that Iran never develops a nuclear weapon and are working closely with our partners to find a diplomatic solution. …

To read the full transcript see https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-06-07/debates/AFDE2D55-B091-49DE-AF1B-A2B598B9DB26/Iran

Other Relevant Information

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Fundamental Rights Report 2023

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

Holocaust Memorial Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3421

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

Online Safety Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137

Nakba Commemoration Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3461

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

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

Same Sex Marriage (Church of England)
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3438

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

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill

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

Universal Jurisdiction (Extension)
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3454

Scottish Parliament

Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill
**Consultations** **new or updated today**

**closes in 4 days**
The UK’s international counter-terrorism policy (closing date 12 June 2023)
https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3120/

**closes in 7 days**
Supporting earlier resolution of private family law arrangements (closing date 15 June 2023)

**closes in 10 days**
Review of the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (closing date 18 June 2023)

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill (closing date 23 June 2023)
https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3146/

Charities tax compliance (closing date 20 July 2023)

JPR 2023 Antisemitism in the UK Survey (closing date not stated)
https://www.jpr.org.uk/panel/UKantisemitism2023 (UK except Scotland) and
https://bit.ly/3Vg7DDH (Scotland)

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