Home Affairs

House of Commons Written Answers

Coroners: Pathology
Matthew Offord (Conservative) [194389] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of the availability of pathologist’s available to assist in coroners’ services.

Mike Freer: The shortage of pathologists to undertake coronial post-mortem examinations is a long-standing and cross-cutting issue.
I am concerned that progress should be made to address the shortage as soon as practicable and so am engaging with relevant Ministerial colleagues to identify and implement urgent action to address the complex underlying issues.

https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-07-17/194389

The following six questions all received the same answer

Coroners: Standards
Matthew Offord (Conservative) [194381] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many inquests in coroners’ courts have been opened and adjourned for longer than two years in (a) England, (b) London and (c) Barnet as of 17 July 2023.
Matthew Offord (Conservative) [194382] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many inquests have remained open for more than two years in each of the last five years.
Matthew Offord (Conservative) [194383] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what is the average length of time from an inquest being opened to it being concluded in each of the last five years.
Matthew Offord (Conservative) [194384] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what is the average length of time from an inquest being opened to it being concluded in each region in England.
Matthew Offord (Conservative) [194385] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether his Department has a target for the length of time an inquest should take from its opening to its conclusion.
Coroners

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [194390] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many inquests have been recorded in each of the last five years.

Mike Freer: The Ministry of Justice publishes Coroner Statistics each May covering the preceding calendar year. The information is collated from data provided by each of the 81 coroner areas across England and Wales. Data from the published statistics is set out in the table below, across all coroner areas for each of the last five years, on the total number of inquests recorded, the average length of inquests, the total number of inquests open for more than two years, and the total number of inquests suspended and not resumed. The requested information for inquests adjourned for longer than two years in England, London and Barnet only is not collated as part of the annual statistics. Table CSV included in the annual publication provides further information for adjourned inquests by coroner area.

The published statistics also record the average length of an inquest in individual coroner areas and Barnet is part of the North London Coroner area with Brent, Harrow, Haringey and Enfield. Table 13 collates this information by region. The Ministry of Justice does not have a target for the length of time an inquest should take. Coroners are independent judicial office holders and the way they manage their caseload is a matter for them. Following the Covid-19 pandemic the Chief Coroner issued guidance to coroners on how their services can best recover and tackle backlogs that accumulated in some areas.

Regulation 26 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013 require coroners to notify the Chief Coroner of any investigation which has not been completed or discontinued within a year of the death being reported to them, and provide reasons for this. They must also notify the Chief Coroner when such investigations are completed or discontinued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of inquests recorded</td>
<td>36,273</td>
<td>32,762</td>
<td>31,991</td>
<td>29,969</td>
<td>29,094</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average length of inquest</td>
<td>30 weeks</td>
<td>31 weeks</td>
<td>27 weeks</td>
<td>27 weeks</td>
<td>26 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inquests open for more than 2 years at year end</td>
<td>1,760</td>
<td>1,366</td>
<td>1,104</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>472</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inquests suspended due to criminal proceedings and not resumed</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>834</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Charity Commission

Charities investigated over poor financial management
The Charity Commission has launched two inquiries into The Telz Talmudical Academy and Talmud Torah Trust and The Gevurath Ari Torah Academy Trust. The regulator’s concerns relate to financial management and controls within the charities, including the use of signed blank cheques.

The charities, which share trustees, were registered in 1987 and 1991 respectively, and raise funds for faith institutes in Israel. The regulator is concerned about the charities’ financial management after discovering that one trustee, who lives in Israel, is in possession of the charities’ cheque books containing a number of blank cheques pre-signed by the trustees who live in the UK.

The charities also operate heavily in cash, which the Commission advises against, overseas and do not maintain adequate records to supplement this. The trustees could not provide sufficient evidence that they were monitoring or verifying the end use of the charities’ funds overseas.

These significant concerns required further scrutiny, so the Charity Commission opened inquiries into the two charities on 17 July 2023. The inquiries will examine the following regulatory issues:

- the administration, governance, and management of the charities by the trustees
- the financial controls and management of the charities
- the conduct of the trustees

The Commission may extend the scope of the inquiries if additional regulatory issues emerge.

Following the opening of the inquiries, the Commission exercised its powers under the Charities Act 2011 and made an order to restrict the trustees from entering into certain transactions. …

To read the full press release see

The Singh Investigation

Independent Review of the implementation by the Conservative Party of the Singh Investigation Recommendations
Israel

House of Commons Written Answer

Israeli Settlements

Flick Drummond (Conservative) [194500] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the implementation of UN Human Rights Council Resolution 31/36 entitled Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan; and if he plans to take steps to support initiatives at the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council on the implementation of the mandate in that resolution.

David Rutley: The UK abstained on UN Human Rights Council resolution 31/36 in 2016 as part of a common EU position. However, we have long opposed the creation of a public database of companies which we consider unhelpful, and which only risks further hardening positions on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is why we voted against the resolution at HRC53 requesting the implementation and funding for resolution 31/36. The UK's longstanding position on the Middle East peace process is clear: we support a negotiated settlement leading to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state based on 1967 lines.

The resolution referred to above can be read at https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/G16/082/57/PDF/G1608257.pdf?OpenElement

Foreign Affairs

Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech: UK statement at the UN General Assembly: Statement by Ambassador to the General Assembly Richard Croker at UN General Assembly 94th plenary meeting 77th session

We have been clear in our position: the UK fully rejects intolerance and discrimination. We denounce hatred on the basis of religion or belief, and we condemn the recent incidents of the burning of the Holy Qu’ran. Defending freedom of religion or belief for all is a priority for the UK and we shall continue to stand up for the rights of all individuals and promote mutual respect.

… there is a balance to strike – and across different societies, this balance is struck in different ways. Determining at what point freedom of expression becomes unacceptable, and when unacceptable speech or action should be prohibited, is a complex issue. However, international human rights law provides us with narrowly defined parameters in which freedom of expression can be limited. We do not accept that, by definition, attacks on religion, including on religious texts or symbols, constitute advocacy for hatred. Furthermore, the framework in place already defines what kind of speech must be prohibited, and what must not be restricted.

Whilst we completely reject acts seeking to incite discrimination, hostility or violence, we need to recognise that the primary function of the international human rights framework is
to protect individuals from the State. There are too many examples in the world where believers – religious or not – have been oppressed by those who are meant to guarantee their rights.

The UK has reluctantly joined consensus on this resolution. …

We remain concerned with several elements of the text, particularly language which could suggest limitations on freedom of expression beyond what is well established in international human rights law. We do not think it is necessary to agree a new definition of hate speech which may undermine the existing finely balanced position in international human rights law, which already provides a clear framework. We, therefore, oppose any future attempts to agree new definitions of hate speech at UN level, including at the proposed conference in 2025. The UK dissociates itself from PP13 and OP2 of the resolution. …


The resolution referred to above can be read at https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/N23/215/02/PDF/N2321502.pdf?OpenElement

Other Relevant Information

United Nations

Legality of Acts against Religious Symbols, Books Ignites Contentious Debate as General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Culture of Peace, Five Other Texts

… Omar Hilale (Morocco) introduced the draft resolution “Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech” (document A/77/L.89), noting that the collective fight against hate speech is even more urgent given the worsening and alarming increase in hate speech due to intolerance in recent years. The draft projects a humanistic vision of human and interstate relations based on religious coexistence and intercommunal harmony, he said. …

In explanation of position before the vote, the representative of Spain, speaking for the European Union, expressed her concern regarding preambular paragraph 13 and the reference to violent acts against religious symbols and sacred book, as a violation of international law. Although she agreed that such actions are deeply offensive and disrespectful, she said they do not constitute a violation of international law. In this regard, she proposed eliminating the reference to “in violation of international law” in the paragraph.

Also explaining his position before the vote, the representative of the United Kingdom, expressing support for the amendment, lamented that the compromise proposal has not been taken on board. During negotiations, his delegation was clear that the text of preambular paragraph 13 is factually inaccurate, he said, also pointing out that it does not strike the right balance between freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. …

[click here to read this speech in greater detail]

Mr. Hilale said … Burning a holy text is not freedom of expression, but an aggression against the religious dignity of people …

The Assembly rejected the oral amendment, proposed by the representative of Spain …

The Assembly then adopted “L.89” as a whole without a vote.

In explanation of position before the vote, the representative of Belgium, speaking for the
European Union, reiterated his opposition to any forms of hate incitement and hate speech. However, the Union stands for the right of freedom of opinion and expression, he said, while expressing regret that the draft resolution focuses on hate speech in a limited context. …

The representative of Oman said the international consensus on this resolution is an important occasion. The culture of peace is based on mutual respect and not desecrating any holy symbols. Such attacks are a form of hate speech. The burning of holy books represents wrong-doing and is an irresponsible act that cannot be justified and perpetrators must be held accountable.

The representative of the United States said her delegation strongly condemns any acts of hate and calls out anti-Muslim hatred whenever it occurs. The United States stands against any act of desecrating any holy book …

The representative of Denmark … stressed that burning the Qur’an or any other holy book is offensive, disrespectful and a clear act of provocation. … [She underscored] the need to carefully distinguish between acts that are offensive and morally reprehensible, yet legal, and acts that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence …

A key concern is preambular paragraph 13 and the references to violent acts against “religious symbols” and “holy books” as a violation of international law, she pointed out. “While we agree that these acts are deeply offensive and disrespectful, they are not a violation of international law,” she stressed. “Freedom of religion or belief is, like all other human rights, an individual right, she added, noting further that it does not protect religion or religious symbols as such, nor does it prohibit the criticism of religions or beliefs. …


Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech (A/77/L.89)

TOP

Relevant Legislation  ** new or updated today

** UK Parliament

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill
https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475

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

Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill (closing date not specified – no later than 14 September 2023 but may be earlier)

A Human Rights Bill for Scotland (closing date 5 October 2023)
The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438

The future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales (closing date 26 October 2023)
https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/