

REPORT from Jeremy Corbyn MP

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I was delighted to visit the **Finsbury Park Mosque** recently (February 11th) to meet the congregation after the conclusion of Friday prayers, and I issued the following statement:

The Islington North MP welcomed the appointment of the additional trustees for the mosque, making it clear that he was delighted to see such a large number of people in attendance praying. He also noted the new spirit of peace, reconciliation and partnership within the local community.

Said Jeremy Corbyn: *I am delighted that the Finsbury Park Mosque is now fully reopened, with its members showing a determination to build its support in the local community and in cooperation with everybody else. It has been a great day. I thank the trustees, staff, and local police for all their help and support in ensuring this peaceful transition coming about.*

The dispute about **Islington's Firefighting Appliances** continues, and along with Chris Smith MP and Emily Thornbury (Islington South's prospective parliamentary candidate), I attended a lengthy meeting with Ken Knight from the London Fire Authority. We are protesting about the proposed removal of two crucial appliances from Islington. We made a very strong argument based upon the fact that Islington has an increasing population, with increased traffic and rail movements around Kings Cross. We therefore need at least the same level, if not an increased of fire cover in the future. Chris, Emily and myself are now addressing a direct appeal to the members of the fire authority on this, to try and save the appliances. Incidentally, Emily Thornbury had issued a call for all political parties in the

borough to attend this meeting, the result of which was that two Conservatives did so but no Lib Dems.

Last week (9th February) **I asked the (Office of) the Deputy Prime Minister** "what plans he has to increase the stock of council and **housing** association dwellings for rent in London.

Yvette Cooper replied: We are investing £1.5 billion over two years to provide more than 21,000 affordable homes in London, of which 10,000 will be social rented, with 7,000 for key workers and 4,000 for low-cost home ownership. London will also share in the additional £430 million of investment in new social rented homes by 2007–08.

I continued: I welcome any new housing for people in London on low incomes or in desperate housing need. Does the Minister recognise that in Inner London, especially, there is an absolute crisis due to the falling supply of council housing because of the Right To Buy and the small number of housing association properties being built? Many children live in disgracefully overcrowded conditions, but the only alternative that people are given by councils is to go away from London, and thus away from families, jobs and education. Does she realise that there is a crying need to invest in homes for rent for people in desperate housing need so that they can remain in their local communities rather than being forced out by wealthy, upwardly mobile people coming in?

These parliamentary interventions (with full answers) are repeated along with many others, as usual, in the middle section of this report.

It is incredible news that the **British Prime Minister has given an apology on behalf of the government to the families of the Guildford Four.** What happened in 1974 was appalling, and what followed was a grotesque miscarriage of justice wherein four people were imprisoned for nearly two decades, and those of us who campaigned for their innocence were routinely abused by the popular press, notably the Sun and the Daily Mail.

The families continue to suffer the trauma they went through, having had their loved ones in prison for a crime they did not commit. I welcome the apology.

One should not however forget that Paul Hill (former Islington resident) was the first person to be arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and I feel that the control orders and other aspects of anti terror legislation recently gone, or currently going through parliament, may well lead to identical miscarriages against people, and possibly Muslims in the future.

Press Engagements since the last report:

19/01 AL Jazeera

20/01: BBC Radio Scotland – Bush Inauguration Debate

26/01: Jeremy Vine Show

30/01: GMTV Sunday Program

10/02: Al Aram TV (Arabian channel of Iranian broadcasting) - Middle East

26/01: Scottish TV

26/01: BBC Radio 5 Live, Mathew Bannister show

TOWARDS PEACE

In parliament I spoke in the **UN Adjournment Debate** on 19th January: transcript of the speech is included in the attached parliamentary interventions.

IRAQ: A Stop the War Protest at the US Embassy on 20th January marked George Bush's inauguration. It was in effect a candlelit vigil for peace which was well attended by a wide range of Stop the War coalition

supporters. I found George Bush's inaugural address chilling in its simplicity and in its implied threat to many countries around the world.

Iraq remains in the spotlight, followed closely by Iran and I have raised this so called "war on terror" many times since it all began, and at Prime Minister's Question time recently I asked: (9th February): Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to assure the House and the rest of the world that he intends to continue an engagement with Iran, rather than join in any American led military attack or military threat towards Iran, either in the near or distant future? **Tony Blair replied:** We are pursuing the policy of engagement, which we have conducted with France and Germany, and indeed with the United States' full support. I have to say to my hon. Friend that it is important also to make it clear to Iran—I hope this is a message that he will join in sending to the Iranian Government—that it cannot breach the rules of the International Atomic Energy Agency and cannot develop nuclear weapons capability. That is the very clear wish of the entire international community. I happen to believe, however, that it can be pursued by diplomatic means of engagement

Stop the War Coalition held a press conference on 19th January with military families who had lost relatives in Iraq, including Rose Gentle, mother of Gordon. The role that military families play in the Iraq protests on both sides of the Atlantic should not be underestimated.

I also attended the **Stop the War Conference and steering committees** at which we continue to organise what we hope will be a huge turnout at the demonstration against British Troops in Iraq on the March 19th demonstration.

Labour Against the War's AGM at ULU (University of London Union, 5th February) had me down as a speaker alongside Jasmin Qureshi (prospective Labour candidate for Brent East) and Tony Benn.

On 2nd February I spoke at an **LSE Anti war Teach-in** organised by Tom Whittaker – which was open to the public.

Alisdair Smith of Islington Stop The War organised a meeting (2nd February) at the Whittington Centre and I spoke about Iraq, as did Ghara Razuki and George Galloway as the meeting was a cross party affair.

What you can do:

- **Attend 19th March national demonstration central London at 1pm.** This day is close to the second anniversary of the vote to go to war
- Donate or affiliate to Labour Against the War, Stop the War, or join Amnesty International or another relevant organisation.
- Keep abreast of things by checking out websites:

Palestine:

At the House (- of Commons), on 25th January, **Palestine** Solidarity held a meeting which I spoke at, along with: Husam Zomlot of the Palestinian General Delegation; Mahmoud Hawari – Palestine Solidarity Campaign; Keith Sonnet - Deputy General Secretary UNISON; Bill Gilby - Trade Union Friends of Palestine. The meeting was entitled “After the Presidential elections - What future for Palestine?” All speakers had been to Palestine to observe the elections there, and reported back on this. Not surprisingly, we did not come to any grand conclusions except that considerable willingness is required from the Israeli government in particular, to move a peace process forward, and that we must ensure the British government plays its part in this role without further delay.

Early in February CAABU (Council for Arab British Understanding) hosted a Britain-Palestine APPG reception attended by Afif Safieh (Palestinian General Delegate to the UK), Baroness Symons (Middle East Minister), Richard Burden MP and others to unite activists and celebrate the beginning of a new era for Palestine with the new leader Abu Mazen.

Meanwhile there have been, and will continue to be meetings of CND with PSC to plan a big lobby for Palestine on 13th July (see below) which I will contribute to.

PSC Patrons meetings (I am a patron) also continue on a regular basis.

I also spoke at a Palestine meeting at Willesden Green Library (9th February), alongside Jasmin Qureshi, Dan Judelson (Jews for Justice), Ken Livingston (the Mayor), and Afif Safieh.

Regarding **Mordechai**: On 8th February a delegation including Llew Smith, Ben Birnberg and Rami Heilbromm met the Israeli Ambassador to protest about the continued restrictions on the movements of **Mordechai**. Suffice it to say that it was a very inconclusive meeting and we must keep pushing for these dreadful restrictions upon Mordechai to be lifted.

What you can do:

First, get yourself a ticket for: **24th February a guitar recital by John Williams and Khaled Jubran, see flier at the back of this report. Boosting the good works of organisations like PSC in this way is about as painless as it gets.**

Put 13th July in your diary for a parliamentary lobby on Israel’s nuclear weapons and WMD.

- Join Palestine Solidarity Campaign
www.palestinecampaign.org

T: 020 7700 6192 F: 020 7609 7779

:info@palestinecampaign.org

- Jews for Justice: PO Box 37402, N3 2XG:

jfjusticefp@yahoo.co.uk

An additional and informative website is that of - Mustafa Bhargouti.

http://www.palestinemonitor.org/mustafa/mustafas_articles.htm

Many events are being organised by PSC and other relevant organisations and if you could help or attend any of them this would be terrific.

TOWARDS AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

As well as my raising this subject in the House of Commons chamber (front page) the All Party Group (APPG) on **Council Housing** met on 19th January to continue pressing the government for the 4th Option, which promotes

local authorities continuing to run council housing with equal access to finance as almost all housing associations. This is of particular significance in areas where no transfer has taken place, eg Camden.

Additionally, the **APPG on Council Housing** held an important witness and lobby session at Labour's spring conference last weekend in Gateshead.

Please also see my questions on Housing in mid section of this report.

On 26th January I attended the **All Party Disability Group** (in the House) where the main speaker was Jean Wilson of our own local Centre 404. Jean gave a brilliant address on the problems carers face, and the absence of a national strategy, as well as the minimum provision of respite care. She made some excellent proposals to the APPG which seemed to be generally supported. I later visited Centre 404 to check on them and I will submit parliamentary questions in order to learn more about the extent of respite care availability in different parts of the country.

I spent an enjoyable couple of hours in the excellent **Grafton School** (20th January), meeting the head teacher, and viewing the splendid new sports hall which has been built in part of the playground. There was plenty of time to chat to the school meals staff, teachers and students meanwhile. I also met the elected School Council, a wonderful group of youngsters who will come to parliament to give me advice at some point soon.

The following day I attended the **Islington Africa Project** (21st January) which included a discussion with Rebecca Brown and some of the groups who use the centre. I am looking forward to a longer discussion in due course with the Islington African Groups, on the Commission for Africa and how progress can be made through the African Diaspora in helping and supporting aid programs.

That afternoon (21st January) I visited the **Medical Foundation for the Victims of**

Torture in Isledon Rd to thank them for their very kind donation of a piece of land to the tenants and residents of Isledon village, which will be used to construct a community centre and youth facilities. This is a wonderful gesture on the part of a wonderful organization!

Walkabouts:

Finsbury Park Branch Walkabout went ahead on 23th January and along with Councillors Spall and O'Sullivan I picked up a number of problems of overcrowding, repairs, and in particular, the disgraceful state of the former Globe pub. The pub has been sold to a Housing Association and construction work has not begun. It is currently in a terrible state of disrepair and is a health hazard which has now been reported to the authorities.

Highbury East had their turn on 6th February which covered Gardiner Court, with Cllr Greening. We picked up a number of problems, among them— lack of refurbishment activity and decent lighting.

In the house on 27th January I spoke in the **Railways Bill – (refer parliamentary interventions)**

Sinn Fein held a meeting later that day (27th January) in the house, which I attended. Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were present to discuss the continuing problems in **Northern Ireland** and the way in which the Northern Ireland police force have blamed the IRA for the Northern Bank robbery, and used this as a pretext for not reopening the Northern Ireland Assembly. I think that such statements should not be made unless they can be backed up with evidence of individual involvement in this such a crime.

Holocaust Memorial Day later that day was marked at City and Islington College (on 27th January) and I was a guest speaker, along with (among others) Yasmin Alibhai Brown (prominent journalist, commentator and activist in the field of Racial Equality). Yasmin gave an interesting talk about the concepts of the Holocaust, linking it to other grotesque abuses

of humanity through history. Afterwards I took part putting a plaque upon a Holocaust Memorial Tree Paul Morris, as did the Chair of Governors and Frank Mcloughlin, the college principal.

With the help of my staff I continue to maintain a close relationship with Holloway Prison, via visits and parliamentary interventions where relevant. On 28th January I met the prisoners there, as well as presenting certificates for a listening program. A farewell was also held for one of the longstanding prisoners who seems to have been well regarded as a mentor to many. (Sue Chatterton organized this event.) Please refer to parliamentary interventions for relevant questions I've asked.

I spoke at a demonstration against the removal of unsuccessful **asylum seekers** to Zimbabwe (29th January) outside the Home Office, as did a number of people from the Zimbabwe opposition movements and the local community.

What You Can Do:

Contact the Lobby from the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS). Please contact CDAS on 07941 566183 or at info@defend-asylum.org

I was privileged to be invited to the 38th birthday party of the **Anna Scher Theater** on 29th January, at which she, along with former and current students gave a brilliant performance of readings. We lamented the way in which the trustees have removed her from her theatre, forcing her to work in exile and deliver her iconic classes at the Church of the Blessed Sacrament on Copenhagen St. The local priest, Father Jim Kennedy is a great supporter of her work, and all the young people who attend her classes continue to be inspired by Anna.

In February (1st) the Foreign Office hosted a visit by a group of **Angolan** Trade Unionists and invited me to meet them. We discussed the role of Trade Unions in society and what

support can be offered by the British Trade Union movement to support them.

Later that day (1st February) **the London Labour Group of MPs** had invited all public sector unions in London to a discussion of the proposed changes by the Deputy Prime Minister. These proposals include raising the retirement age for public service pensioners. Quite understandably this has met with huge opposition within the unions and a wide range of Members from all parties have signed a House of Commons prayer against the statutory instruments, which will bring the changes into effect.

What you can do: On Friday 18th February at 12.30 outside the Town Hall there's a demonstration at which I'll speak along with representatives from the FBU (Fire Brigade's Union), PCS (Public and Commercial Services Union), pensioners and Jane Doolan (Islington Unison) This event is part of the wider TUC day of action to defend pensions.

I was invited to meet Jilani Choudhury and other officials at the Surma Centre (4th February) in Roberts St, Camden for a discussion about the issues facing the Bangladeshi community in London, and the ongoing problems in **Bangladesh**.

In the evening (5th February) I accepted an invitation to **Parikiaki's** 30th anniversary annual dinner dance. For those who may not know, Parikiaki is the north London based Greek Cypriot newspaper which has provided a terrific service to the community over the years. The event was at the Regency Banqueting Suite and properly commemorated the paper's coverage of life in North London over the years.

I spoke at a **Bloody Sunday event** at Conway Hall on 6th February: "Belfast to Basra", as did Jean Hegarty (mother of one of the victims of the Bloody Sunday shooting in 1972) and a Sinn Fein deputy.

On 7th February I visited the **Lower Hildrop Estate** and picked up various complaints about

the conditions on the estate which I will take up with Homes for Islington .

On that evening (7th February) a local meeting had been organised for the Islington Somali groups at the Andover Community Centre which was designed to unite all the groups as part of national lobby for **Somalia**.

After much planning, on 8th February, about 50 **Islington North enthusiasts** who could make it, visited the Commons to hear journalists Kevin Maguire and Felicity Arbuthnot, with Alan Simpson MP and Professor Glen Rangwala discuss two very important subjects: public services and Iraq. Kevin Maguire kept his discussion of public services relatively light-hearted with references such as “Ruth Kelly, Minister for Opus Dei”, whilst Felicity Arbuthnot gave a heart rendering account of her visits to Iraq. Glen Rangwala briefed us on the current Bush administration and Alan Simpson talked about the efforts which are required by everyone including his constituents to control global warming, if he is not to become (some time in the near future) MP of “Nottingham-sur-mer” before long. A social gathering followed in the St Stephens Tavern and I’m delighted to have caught up with those who could make the event.

A Tea Party was held for **Ron Lendon** at the Turning Point Restaurant (9th February): Ron is a fascinating character who grew up in great difficulty and poverty following WW1 and qualified as a teacher following WW2, going on to become head of Brookfield School in Camden. On retirement he took on the voluntary job of coordinating volunteers at the Whittington hospital. He has just retired after 25 years and thousands of hours of voluntary work supporting visitors and patients. Hundreds of people in the hospital and from the wider community came to the cafeteria in the hospital to say one big thank you to Ron for all his work, and the farewell was reported in the local press.

I attended the PLP (Parliamentary Labour Party) **Northern Ireland** Committee on 19th February along with the Irish Ambassador Daithi O’Ceallaigh.

Additional Surgeries held this month as well as the routine schedule included:

5th February: Congolese Surgery @ St Mellitus’
11th February: Muslim Welfare House

Jeremy’s current Advice surgery schedule:

Friday 18th February, 4 – 6 pm
Old Fire Station, Mayton St, N19; No appointment necessary, but please be prepared to wait.

Friday 25th February, 10 – 12 noon
Caxton House, 129 St. John’s Way, N19; Appointment only, please ring after 20th February to book.

Friday 4th March, 4 – 6 pm
Old Fire Station, Mayton St, N19; Appointment only, please ring after 27th February to book.

Thursday 10th March, 10 – 12 noon.
Mildmay Library, 21-23 Mildmay Prk, N1; No appointment necessary, but please be prepared to wait.

Friday 11th March, 10 – 12 noon.
Mayville Community Centre, Woodville Rd, N16; No appointment necessary, but please be prepared to wait.

Friday 18th March, 4 – 6 pm
Old Fire Station, Mayton St, N19.
No appointment necessary, but please be prepared to wait.

Friday 25th March – No surgery – Easter Bank Holiday.

If you prefer: You could write to Jeremy with details of your problem: 213A Blackstock Road, London, N5 2LL. **The office telephone number is 020 7226 5775.**