



Ken Macintosh MSP  
Presiding Officer  
Scottish Parliament

*by e-mail*

Dear Presiding Officer

### **CROSS PARTY GROUP ON PALESTINE – MEETING ON 25 APRIL**

I am writing to raise some concerns about a discussion which happened at the Cross-Party Group on Palestine on 25 April, which I attended. As you know, this CPG normally has a significant attendance from external bodies and individuals.

I emailed the official Parliamentary contact, Amanda Gordon, on 23 April asking that I and Nigel Goodrich, CEO of the International Shalom Festival, be added to the list of attendees. Amanda kindly emailed back on 24 April confirming our attendance and notifying me of the changed start time of 1830. I also consulted the Scottish Parliament website for the agenda which was – and still is - as per the following screenshot:



When the meeting started, Vice-Convenor Sandra White MSP passed round a different agenda, which included an item on the definition of antisemitism in Scotland. This replaced the Balfour item we were expecting and had not been on the agenda on the Parliament's website. However, having consulted the minutes of previous meetings, I see that it was raised by Philip Chetwynd, the Treasurer of the CPG, at the October 2016 meeting, and discussion deferred from the February 2017 meeting at the request

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation no. SC029438

of Sandra White. It was also stated at some point in the meeting on 25 April that Ross Greer MSP would be chairing this item, but Ross Greer did not attend the meeting.

The meeting started with presentations by Gerry McHare on cancer nurse education in the West Bank and by Dr Colin Cooper on palliative care in Gaza. These were very interesting presentations. Mr Goodrich and I listened in silence to these presentations and did not make any intervention.

When it came time for the discussion on the definition of antisemitism in Scotland, to my astonishment, Philip Chetwynd said that he was not prepared to speak to the item because of the presence of 'representatives of three Zionist organisations' at the meeting. He stated that it was the policy of the CPG not to permit attendance by anyone who had not registered as a member of the group and accepted its objectives. This process involves signing a registration form and paying £1, which we were invited to do at the start of the meeting but which I had not yet done because I had not had a chance to consider the matter.

Mr Chetwynd further said that the 3 people were 'ideological terrorists' and that he felt 'intimidated' and, at some point, he referred to Ken Livingston and to an Al Jazeera programme some months ago which purported to expose activities in the Labour Party involving the Israel Embassy. He appeared to make some links in his mind between certain people attending the CPG meeting and these unrelated events.

It was quite clear that the 3 people referred to were myself, Mr Goodrich and a long-standing resident of Scotland of Israeli nationality who was sitting beside us. Mr Chetwynd was quite clearly calling for our removal from the meeting before he would proceed with his thoughts on the definition of antisemitism in Scotland.

Following Mr Chetwynd's statement, I stated that I represented the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities and that this is not a Zionist organisation but speaks for Jewish people living in Scotland and that we have a strong interest in the definition of antisemitism in Scotland. I said that I had thought the Parliament was open to all of Scotland's citizens and was surprised at the suggestion anyone should be excluded. I confirmed that I had signed the sederunt list but had not signed the objectives.

Following my statement a number of MSPs made interventions opposing the idea that anyone should be removed from the CPG. They were followed by a number of representatives of external organisations, saying the same thing.

After this short debate, Sandra White ruled out excluding us. Philip Chetwynd again said he would not speak and asked that a short life working group be set up to look at the definition of antisemitism in Scotland as he did 'not want to give these people ammunition'. The meeting then ended after a short item of AOCB.

As you can imagine, I have a number of concerns about these events.

First and foremost, I feel that I and the other two people referred to above were subjected to an antisemitic attack in the Scottish Parliament by the use of the term 'ideological terrorists'. The comments of some of those who opposed excluding us would appear to confirm that they saw this as an antisemitic attack, as they said they did not want it to look as if the CPG was targeting Jewish people.

Secondly, I consider that the public were misled about the meeting. The item on the definition of antisemitism in Scotland was not advertised as part of the agenda for this meeting, meaning that people who had an interest in that item (whether signed up to the objectives or not) would have had no notice that the item was to be discussed.

Thirdly, I have to question why the definition of antisemitism in Scotland is relevant to a Cross-Party Group on Palestine. I do not see how it furthers the objectives of the Group which are

To establish a forum for Palestinians living in Scotland.

To promote a solution for the Palestinian people recognising the justice of their cause and the need for the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to adhere to UN resolutions and International Law.

My fourth point is that in the past the CPG has had numerous external attenders, up to 74 at one meeting, and I am sure that they were not all signed up. In addition, I have looked through the minutes of all the previous meetings and I cannot find the place where it states that the CPG decided to exclude everyone who had not signed up. I may have missed this of course and the minutes are of variable detail. But I would have expected that Amanda Gordon might have queried me when I applied to attend, if such an exclusionary criterion was in place.

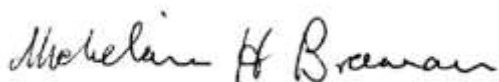
The effect of the antisemitic attack which I experienced was distressing and concerning and indeed I have never in my adult life or my role as Chair of SCoJeC been targeted so overtly. I am proud of the Scottish Parliament that the MSPs did not concede Mr Chetwynd's agenda but I do not know what may subsequently happen behind closed doors.

I would add that, should the Scottish Parliament wish to debate the definition of antisemitism in Scotland, SCoJeC and our partner organisations stand ready to assist the Parliament in whatever way we can. We have wide experience and knowledge of the subject, particularly having been funded by the Scottish Government to investigate the experience of "Being Jewish in Scotland" ([www.scojec.org/bjis\\_findings.html](http://www.scojec.org/bjis_findings.html) and [www.scojec.org/bjis2\\_findings.html](http://www.scojec.org/bjis2_findings.html)), and it would seem an appropriate subject for a Justice Committee or the Equal Opportunities Committee rather than the CPG on Palestine. I hope therefore that, if this matter is to be debated by the Scottish Parliament, such a process will be public and transparent and that we will be invited to contribute.

I would be grateful for your consideration of whether someone with Mr Chetwynd's views is an appropriate person to hold office in a Cross Party Group of the Scottish Parliament.

I am placing a copy of this letter on SCoJeC's website and informing local and national newspapers of its content.

Yours faithfully



Micheline Brannan  
*Chair*