

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

Director's and Public Affairs Officer's Report **AGM 28 October 2007**

Scottish Parliament and Government

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) continues to monitor activity in the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government on a daily basis, forwarding relevant information to a wide range of organisations including Jewish Care, Cosgrove Care, Calderwood Lodge, Calderwood Jewish Education, the Board of Deputies, CST, students and other interested bodies.

Due to our policy of building good relationships with MSPs of all parties we already have good relationships with many members of the new SNP government, and, as in the last Parliament, we have ample opportunities for informal access to senior ministers, and are therefore able to respond to events quickly and effectively.

Kirking of the Scottish Parliament

Following the Scottish Parliament election in May, Ephraim and Leah represented SCoJeC at the traditional "Kirking of the Scottish Parliament", which was held in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh in the presence of Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay. The service of music and readings included a prayer read by Ephraim in Hebrew and English, and a reading from the Quran by an Imam, as well as contributions from the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Cardinal, and the Principal of the Free Church College.

Petitions

There have been a series of anti-Israel petitions submitted to the Scottish Parliament, including one from a leading member of the Office of Muslim Affairs, that referred to Israel as an "evil apartheid regime" involved in "genocide... currently being inflicted on the Palestinian population in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank".

Petitions procedure does not afford any opportunity for an unsolicited counter-statement to be laid before the committee, though the committee can choose to invite evidence from interested parties. However, SCoJeC wrote to the Public Petitions Committee in advance of their consideration of the petition, to inform MSPs of previous occasions when discussion of Israel has resulted in antisemitic incidents in Scotland, and to request them to bear this in mind when considering the petition. In the event, the convener simply read out the petition and drew the committee's attention to our letter, before pointing out that the petitioner was asking for something that is already available, namely "to ensure that Scottish people are free to speak out in condemnation of such acts." Other MSPs agreed, and there was a unanimous decision to close the petition after only two minutes consideration.

We continue to brief relevant communal organisations, and the Israeli Embassy on matters raised in motions and petitions, and on the associated parliamentary procedures. We also continue to brief MSPs on issues concerning the Jewish community, and, where appropriate, put them in touch with other organisations, such as the Israel Information Office, which have been able to brief them on specific issues.

Consultation Responses

We have responded to consultations on a wide range of issues (full list attached), and would like to thank the many communal organisations and individuals whose expertise has contributed to these responses. All consultation responses are available online at www.j-scot.org.uk/Consultations/Consultations.html, and information about consultation responses in process of preparation is available at http://www.j-scot.org.uk/Members/Current_Consultations/Current_Consultations.html

Family Law Act

Following the passage of the Family Law (Scotland) Act (2006), a number of Scottish Statutory Instruments were required to give effect to the *get* clause in court procedure. SCoJeC was not consulted on the drafting of these, and, unfortunately, they and their associated forms and notes contained two serious errors that affected the wording of some fifteen Court forms, and which had serious implications for the Catholic Church as well as for the Jewish community. We alerted the Scottish Government and Canon Lawyers to the problem, and, after lengthy discussions, new SSIs were laid, and became operative from late February.

Nazi-Looted Art

The UK Parliament “Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Bill” included a section that could deny the rightful owners of works of art stolen by the Nazis the opportunity of recovering them. SCoJeC has liaised closely with the Board of Deputies and the Commission for Looted Art in Europe, to ensure that the UK Government received a consistent message from the Jewish community throughout the UK, and also to win the support of the Scottish Government.

As cultural policy is devolved, the Scottish Parliament required to pass a “Legislative Consent Motion” to enable the UK legislation to apply in Scotland. SCoJeC, therefore, made representations to the Justice 2 Committee, which considered the LCM in December 2006, and to the Parliamentary Bureau, which agreed to timetable a short debate. We then briefed the Justice spokesmen of each of the parties, with the result that speakers from all of the main political parties emphasised the moral case for amending the Bill, and urged Scottish Ministers to press for appropriate amendments at Westminster. As a result, the Minister undertook to convey the concerns of the Scottish Parliament to the Westminster Government.

SCoJeC then wrote to all Scottish MPs to alert them to the expressed view of the Scottish Parliament, with the result that most wrote to express their concerns to the UK Minister.

Although a number of useful amendments were accepted during the remainder of the Bill's passage, much will rely on secondary legislation, which, despite the Legislative Consent Motion, cannot be made without the consent of Scottish Ministers. In August, we therefore met Linda Fabiani, Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture, to discuss our ongoing concerns.

Linda Fabiani agreed unreservedly that there must be a rigorous and enforceable requirement for museums and galleries to research and publish provenance before borrowing works of art from abroad, and supported the proposals set out in SCoJeC's briefing paper. The DCMS has issued a consultation paper setting out its proposals, and Linda Fabiani has requested SCoJeC to brief her on these, and to ensure she receives a copy of our response as early as possible in order to inform the Scottish Government response.

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act

This Act, which will make wide-reaching changes to the "Disclosure" system for people working with children and vulnerable adults, was passed early this year, but will not be implemented until summer 2009. SCoJeC, which acts as the clearing house for the vast majority of Disclosure Scotland applications from the community, is represented on one of the Scottish Government consultative groups to advise on the secondary legislation and the practicalities that need to be addressed before implementation.

Brit Milah

SCoJeC was involved in a series of meetings about circumcision, organised by the Scottish Government and including Muslim representatives as well as a variety of health professionals and administrators. The Government's abolition of "ASC codes" has major implications for NHS waiting list targets, particularly in Glasgow where over 400 Muslim boys are currently on the separate circumcision waiting list which is not included in the published statistics. The Jewish community is being held up as a model of good practice by the Scottish Government, NHS and the Muslim community.

Faith Liaison Group

SCoJeC is represented on the Scottish Executive Faith Liaison Group (FLaG) which enables policy civil servants from all Executive departments to consult representatives of faith communities on proposed initiatives. The Government's Equality Unit has recently conducted a review of FLaG, and its current proposals protect SCoJeC's position alongside those Christian denominations that have a Public Affairs Officer, whereas other smaller faiths will be represented in rotation through the Interfaith Council.

Other organisations

Disclosure Scotland

SCoJeC continues to act as a Registered Body with the CRBS (Central Registered Body in Scotland) to enable communal organisations to meet the requirements of the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act, and, at their request, to administer Disclosure applications for the Scottish Interfaith Council.

SCoJeC attends regular meetings with the CRBS to discuss issues around Disclosure, and is also a member of the Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group. This provides a forum in which all of the Christian denominations and the Jewish community are able to share information and expertise about Disclosure and related issues.

General Register Office for Scotland

In order for a religious marriage to serve also as a civil marriage in Scotland the 1977 Marriage Act requires the officiating minister to be recognised by the relevant faith community as a bona fide minister. Rabbis employed in Scottish synagogues are automatically recognised, but a question arises when a couple wish to be married by a Rabbi from outwith Scotland or even outwith the UK.

This question is complicated by the wording of the Act which refers to the "Hebrew Congregation", a body that does not exist. In the past this has given rise to a number of difficulties, not least because the Reform Synagogue does not include the words "Hebrew Congregation" in its name.

This was clearly not satisfactory, and, following discussions and extensive negotiations with the Office of the Chief Rabbi, GROS has agreed to contact SCoJeC when it receives an enquiry as to whether a Rabbi is "recognised by the Hebrew Congregation" to determine whether a religious marriage conducted by that Rabbi should also be recognised as a civil marriage.

SCoJeC has already responded to several enquiries after obtaining information from the relevant Jewish authority; these have included the Office of the Chief Rabbi, the London Beth Din, the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, and Reform Judaism.

Church of Scotland

SCoJeC continues to hold regular meetings with the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland, and also had a formal meeting Moderator, and Principal Clerk. We expressed concerns about the tenor of a report on the Middle East that was presented to the Church's General Assembly in May. Although the "Deliverances" (resolutions) passed by the General Assembly were balanced and did not include any boycott motion, the report included an extremely tendentious attack on the proposition that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. Both the Moderator and the Principal Clerk (who is a former Moderator) expressed their understanding of our concerns.

Diane Wolfson, the Convener of the Scottish Inter Faith Council, who was, until June, SCoJeC's representative on that body, was invited to address the General Assembly. Her speech was very well received, and her commitment to interfaith activity was welcomed by the Moderator and delegates.

The Church of Scotland has recently appointed an Interfaith Officer in demonstration of its intention to engage more actively in this area, and SCoJeC had a very positive meeting with him last month.

Muslim Community

SCoJeC attended a two-day conference in Eastwood organised by Osama Saeed and the Office of Muslim Affairs under the title "Weaving the Tartan: the Muslim contribution to Scotland". We expected that its intention was to foster good community relations, especially as it included both a video of Alex Salmond speaking from Bute House and a speech, in person, from Nicola Sturgeon.

However, the tone, especially on the first day, was clearly not designed to foster good community relations, and, for the most part, had little to do with "the Muslim contribution to Scotland".

We have discussed this in great detail with the CST and, in accordance with their advice, have privately briefed a wide range of relevant people and organisations. We will continue to monitor the situation and to liaise with the CST and others as appropriate.

STUC

SCoJeC has held a number of bilateral meetings with the STUC to discuss matters of mutual concern, and has been invited once again, to contribute a short essay to its annual anti-racism brochure.

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) has removed more than 7,500 charities from the Charity Register, the majority because they did not complete an Annual Return, and subsequently failed to respond to all attempts to contact them. By monitoring lists as they appeared, SCoJeC was able to alert a number of communal charities to the fact that they risked losing charitable status. Most of these contacted OSCR, and, as a result, are still Registered Charities.

SCoJeC has made representations to OSCR concerning its policy of moving to web-only publication, as this has caused difficulties for some small communal organisations that require to distribute guidance documents to trustees and members of staff. Not all of these have internet access, (indeed, OSCR's own figures indicated that only 56% of registered charities have internet access), and the cost of printing out multiple copies strains the finances of the organisations concerned.

BEMIS

SCoJeC's director, Ephraim Borowski, is also Vice-Chair of BEMIS (the Scottish ethnic minority infrastructure organisation), and we welcome continued collaboration on projects such as MEMO and MEMO+. (*see below*)

Ethnic Minority Civic Congress

SCoJeC attends the new Ethnic Minority Civic Congress in order to monitor its activities. It has been set up by CEMVO (an umbrella body representing a number of ethnic minority voluntary sector organisations) with funding from the Scottish Government and the (now defunct) CRE, with the intention of supporting increased engagement of ethnic minority communities with public affairs. However, we have a number of concerns, which are shared by others, that it appears to be a gatekeeper organisation that will limit rather than promote such engagement.

We are particularly disturbed by an occasional antisemitic undercurrent; for example, at one of their recent public meetings the organiser stated that an assault on a teenage Jewish boy could not have been racist, on the grounds that the boy is not black.

Externally Funded Projects

Outreach

SCoJeC has been awarded funding from both the Scottish Government and the Clore Foundation to undertake an outreach project intended to identify Jewish people living in rural and often remote areas of Scotland. We are aware that many of these mistakenly believe themselves to be the only Jewish person for miles around, and often feel uncomfortably isolated. Where they have become aware of SCoJeC's existence and have contacted us we have often been able to put them in touch with other Jewish people living locally. A large number of local newspapers have been contacted, and the majority have expressed interest in publishing a report that will raise local awareness of the Jewish community and publicise SCoJeC's contact details.

"Scotland's Jews"

Funding has also been awarded by the Scottish Government to produce an updated and expanded version of the booklet 'Scotland's Jews'. This will include a history of the Jewish community in Scotland, and information about Judaism for employers, hospital staff, the police, and other relevant individuals and organisations.

"MEMO" and "MEMO+" (Minority Ethnic Matters Overview)

We continue to receive very positive feedback about MEMO, the weekly bulletin of information relevant to minority ethnic communities in Scotland which is compiled in response to a request from BEMIS. MEMO, which reached its 100th issue earlier this month, includes information about relevant activity in the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments, the Scottish Government and Whitehall, organisations such as the NHS, Equalities and Human Rights Coalition, as well as details of relevant consultations and new publications.

In addition to ongoing funding from BEMIS, SCoJeC has been awarded a grant from the Scottish Executive to expand MEMO. To date MEMO+ has provided information about the voting systems used in the Scottish Parliamentary and Council elections, the new Scottish Parliament and Government, and several relevant consultations. MEMO and MEMO+ are circulated to several hundred voluntary sector ethnic minority organisations, as well as some Scottish Government departments, UK organisations, and local and national communal organisations, and are available online at www.j-scot.org.uk/MEMO/MEMO_2007.html and www.j-scot.org.uk/MEMO+/MEMO+.html.

“Four Corners”

“Four Corners”, which has been expanded and improved this year, continues to be very well-received. The majority of paper copies are sent to people living in the smaller Jewish communities or outwith any Jewish community, but it also has a large online readership at www.j-scot.org.uk/Four_Corners/Four_Corners.html.

Public Resource

Website (www.j-scot.org.uk)

SCoJeC’s website is extremely well-used, with between 1000 and 1500 unique visitors each month, viewing a total of around 12,000 pages. Of these, last month 1200 looked at *MEMO*, and 700 at *Four Corners*. The statistics show that it is read by people from all over the world as well as in Scotland. Many of these subsequently contact us, because they are either planning holidays in Scotland, or considering moving here, and we have responded to that demand by producing an electronic leaflet, “Jewish Scotland: a visitors’ guide” to provide basic information about the community. This will be available on the “Communities” page of the website later this week.

Minutes of SCoJeC meetings and information about current consultations are available on the Members’ pages. (SCoJeC members who do not already have a password should contact Leah Granat to have one allocated.)

SCoJeC continues to respond to a wide variety of enquiries, which this year have included requests to know the history of Jewish clans in Scotland, why Scottish communal organisations do not distribute collectable lapel pins, and the correct tartan for a Jewish man to wear as a kilt, in addition to the usual erev Yom Tov requests to know the address of local shuls in Inverness and Ullapool.

Finally, Ephraim and Leah would like to thank the Management Team for their ongoing support throughout the past year.

Ephraim Borowski
Leah Granat

October 2007

Consultation Responses submitted since the last AGM

Please note that copies of all of these responses, and of responses submitted in previous years, are available on SCoJeC's website at <http://www.j-scot.org.uk/Consultations/Consultations.html>

Ethnicity Strand of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (*UKHLS*)

Draft Fire Safety Regulations for Places of Entertainment and Assembly (*Scottish Government*)

Charity Reorganisations draft Guidance (*Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator*)

Spring 2007 Census Consultation (*General Register Office for Scotland*)

Mainstreaming Equalities (*Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator*)

Non-household Water Charges (*Scottish Executive*)

Legislative Consent Motion to the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcements Bill (*Scottish Parliament*)

Ethnic Group, National Identity, Religion and Language for the 2011 Census (*Office of National Statistics*)

National Strategy and Action Plan on Race Equality (*Scottish Executive*)

Protection of Vulnerable Groups Bill (*Scottish Parliament*)

Public Events Held by the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities since the last AGM

December 2007

Intercommunal Chanukah party (Lochgilphead)

March 2007

Reception and Dinner for Rabbi David Rosen (former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, and Chair, of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations)
(in association with Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation)

September 2007

Briefing on the proposed new Fire Safety Regulations for Places of Entertainment and Assembly (includes synagogues and other communal buildings)
(in association with Glasgow Jewish Representative Council)

Still to take place in 2007:

November/December 2007: Visit by the First Minister, Alex Salmond

9 December 2007: Intercommunal Chanukah party
(venue to be confirmed)

Meetings, Briefings, Conferences etc attended since the last AGM

Regular meetings

Scottish Executive Faith Liaison Group
Scottish Government Voluntary Sector Advisory Group on the Protection of
Vulnerable Groups Act
Church of Scotland
STUC
BEMIS
Churches Parliamentary Officer meetings
Policy Officers Network
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office briefings
Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition
Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group
Central Registered Body in Scotland Faith Liaison Group
Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group
Faith in Communities Scotland
Board of Deputies
Antisemitism Co-ordinating Committee

Occasional and one-off meetings, seminars and conferences

Scottish Executive consultative group on circumcision
Scottish Executive consultation meeting on the Race Equality Strategy
Scottish Executive consultation meeting on Fire Safety Regulations
Scottish Executive Infant Feeding Policy steering group
First Minister's Edinburgh Castle Reception: Working against Sectarianism
Scottish Executive: Working against Sectarianism
Kirking of the Scottish Parliament
Scottish Parliament Equalities Conference
Scottish Parliament Futures Forum
International Women's Day conference
Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group: A culture of peace in Scotland
Association for Scottish Public Life
Lanarkshire Police launch of initiative against racist crime
Ethnic Minority Civic Congress
Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance
Association of Churches Together in Scotland Child Protection Group
Joint Advisory Board on Criminal Justice seminar
General Register Office for Scotland consultation event on the 2011 census
Baillie Lecture (given by Ephraim Borowski)
The Place of Faith in Scotland
Scottish Interfaith Council

Occasional and one-off meetings, seminars and conferences (continued)

Moderator, Church of Scotland
Church of Scotland General Assembly
Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition Development Forum
Meem multi-faith training days
Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator consultation events and Annual Conference
NES Spiritual Care Committee
Lanarkshire NHS Spiritual Care Policy steering group
Fife Anne Frank Festival and Holocaust Memorial Day event
Ethnic Minority Women in the Labour Market
Community Voices
Reception for the Israeli Ambassador
SCVO Conference: What Government for Scotland?
SCPO Annual Lecture
Scottish Women's Convention consultation with ethnic minority women
Association of Kindertransport and Holocaust Survivors
Building Bridges: EU Employment Regulations
STUC Black Workers' Committee Hustings
GJRC Hustings
Sharing Child Protection Information consultative event
Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition consultation on the Equalities Review
PON conference: Scotland's New Government
Learning Link conference: Welcoming New Scots
Scottish Futures Forum: What does it mean to be Scottish?
Newly Appointed Chaplains Conference
Discrimination Law Review conference
Lanarkshire Museums service
Conference: Weaving the Tartan: The Muslim contribution to Scotland
Lecture: Engaging Citizens
Faith in Community Scotland Transformation Team
NES Chaplaincy Standards working group
Lecture: International Conflict Resolution
Broughton Kirk Session Elders Retreat
Reception given by Archbishop Conti
NRCEMH conference: Five Years On