



## Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

The Rev John Chalmers  
Principal Clerk  
Church of Scotland  
121 George Street  
Edinburgh EH2 4YR

12 May 2013

Dear John,

May I begin by putting on record our thanks for what I hope you all agree was a very helpful and constructive meeting last Thursday. We are particularly grateful for the candid way we were able to talk together.

We were appreciative that Sally began by recognising that the language of the report is open to misinterpretation and that that has caused considerable hurt and upset. We also appreciated your own acknowledgement that much of this could have been avoided had we continued to meet regularly as in the past, and Kathy's recognition at the end of the meeting of how hurtful it is to be criticised for what is not true. I should like also to place on record our appreciation of your good faith in removing the draft report from your website and redirecting the link to the joint statement, even though that is not something we had explicitly discussed.

That said, however, the proof of the pudding will be in the redrafting. We have already been contacted by a number of people who are concerned that the joint statement only undertakes to add "a new introduction to set the context for the report and give clarity about some of the language used". I hope it was clear from our discussion that that would not be sufficient. We identified instances of selective quotation, tendentious interpretation of sources, misrepresentation of marginal views as mainstream, imprecision of language when discussing both Jews and Palestinians, bias and supersessionism, throughout the draft report. Without being specific, that is accepted in the preamble to our joint statement, and it is implicit in your decision to remove the original from your website. None of these are ills that can be cured simply to adding an introduction about "context and language", so we trust it is clear that unless these are no longer present in the revised document when it is laid before the Assembly, it will remain unacceptable, and we will be in exactly the same position as we were when the draft was published.

If, as our joint statement envisages, this experience is to be "a catalyst for a continuing and growing conversation", then it is better to do it right than to do it fast. We therefore hope that you will agree that this cannot be achieved against a tight deadline, and that it would be best to withdraw the document from this year's General Assembly with the intention to present a report next year that is in the spirit of our meeting and of the 2003 report on "Theology of Land and Covenant":

*6.3.1 As Christians we must be sensitive and accept that we have no right to dictate to Jews how they ought to respond to their traditions; whether, for example, they should be Zionists or non-Zionists, religious or secular. Such issues are rightly part of a lively inner Jewish debate. Judaism has its own integrity, distinctive practices and theological traditions. Central to many of these are convictions about the land of Israel, which must be recognised and respected in accordance with the Bible.*

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**6.3.2** *As Christians we must always acknowledge and rejoice in our debt to the Jewish people. We are both part of one religious family. Christianity emerged from the womb of the Jewish people. We share with them the Hebrew Scriptures. Much of the New Testament is not understandable except in the light of what we call the Old Testament, and that Old Testament is still part of the Word of God for us. It follows, therefore, that we must do everything in our power to oppose anti-semitism in any form. This is all the more important today since there is evidence of a new emerging and growing anti-semitism, not least in Europe - and this at a time when there is an increasing tendency to demonise people of other faiths and cultures. The horror of the holocaust should remind us where xenophobia and anti-semitism can lead.*

We trust therefore that our continuing dialogue will not centre solely on the geopolitics of the Middle East, but primarily on the experience of Jewish people in Scotland, to which we drew your attention at our meeting. We hope you will share our concerns which are based on evidence, for example from the courts, where anti-zionist views are frequently offered in attempted mitigation of antisemitic hate crime; and from a survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research that found that more than half (52%) of Jewish students in Scotland had experienced antisemitism. During our Government-funded study of the diversity of experience of *Being Jewish in Scotland* last year, no fewer than 4 out of 5 respondents spontaneously raised the topic of Israel or Zionism, with the vast majority reporting that the undisputed increase of anti-zionist activity in Scotland affects their well-being, typical comments being that the "*growing intolerance regarding Israel in Scotland · is in danger of becoming antisemitism*", and that "*I sometimes feel afraid of stating openly my background and beliefs. I see increasing hostility in my surroundings*".

As we have made clear, this document, if accepted by the General Assembly even with the fig-leaf of a new introduction, still has the potential to cause serious damage to the relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities in Scotland, as well as to the reputation of the Church of Scotland and indeed Scotland itself in the wider world and even beyond. That being the case, we would once again urge that this deliverance be withdrawn or referred back from the forthcoming General Assembly in order to enable us to engage in a serious and sustained theological and scriptural dialogue on the issues raised in the report. Because we value our relationship, as we are sure you do, we urge you to join us in seeking an understanding that will continue to bring our communities together rather than drive us further apart.

Yours sincerely,



Ephraim Borowski  
Director

cc other participants