

STUC St Andrew's Day Anti-Racism Brochure 2008
Message of support from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

As I write, I am listening to Big Ben chiming the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, marking the end of the First World War. I never fail to be moved – though I am not clear whether by that monstrous loss of life, or the naive idealism with which so many marched into the line of fire – or by anger, mainly for the self-evident fact that the so-called "war to end all wars" was no such thing. Even in Europe it was barely twenty years until more blood was being spilt on the same soil, although this time to defeat tyranny, not merely to avenge the death of a minor royal.

The Second World War helped create the world we are now familiar with – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the EEC, the United Nations. But all that came too at the cost of millions of lives, this time not by any means mainly in battle, but in the killing fields – and factories – of the Holocaust.

The beginning of that horror was also marked this week, when, in a recent but very moving tradition, synagogues throughout Europe left their lights on all night to mark the 70th anniversary of the state-sponsored pogrom of *Kristallnacht*. Throughout Germany homes were looted, Jewish families were rounded up and sent to the first camps, and synagogues burned to the ground – and we all know how much worse it was to become, not just for Jews, but for all the other minorities for which the self-deluding guardians of German *kultur* could find neither feelings nor space.

That is why the symbolism of the brightly illuminated synagogues on the anniversary is so powerful – they blaze with light and positive energy, when once they blazed with fire and destruction, sending the message that we are proud to be who we are, and not bowed by persecution; above all, they declare the amazing resilience of the human spirit, the capacity to overcome physical near-annihilation and create a better future.

So for all those reasons, perhaps the most moving event I attended this week was the launch at Glasgow University of the first UK branch of OneVoice, a joint Palestinian and Israeli grass-roots movement promoting coexistence and a two-state solution to that intractable running sore. I am proud to have been there when Israeli and Palestinian speakers acknowledged that although they are unlikely to agree about the rights and wrongs of history, the time has long-since come to stop the squabbling and build a coalition for peace.

As one speaker said, finger-pointing and yelling "You started it", "No, you did" is best left in the kindergarten. He should have said the same about "My hurt is worse than your hurt", and "My dad could thrash your dad"! It is the future that matters, and mature people – and mature nations – have to realise and come to terms with the fact that not everyone they share the world with will love them or deserve their love. But they are there, they will not go away, and so coexistence and co-operation are the only rational way forward.

Perhaps then we can build the *peace* that will end all wars.

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