

## **The Rule of Law**

### *Thought for the Day*

*Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)*

*Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 28 November 2014*

Earlier this week I was detained by the police for 48 hours – not, I hasten to explain, in a dungeon, euphemistically helping with enquiries, but taking part with a group of senior officers in an exercise on the management of what are called Critical Incidents – incidents that could significantly affect the confidence of the victims and their families or communities.

Aside from the fascinating glimpse behind the scenes at how the police think about these issues and what they take into account in making operational decisions, I was interested that their concern to take account of public perception was one of the lessons they learned from the mishandling of the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence, along with the identification of institutional racism and the determination to address it.

But whenever I escaped from the make-believe world of scenarios and role-play and switched on the news, it was all too clear that the world was continuing on its sadly depressing way, with its wars and riots and terrorism and crime.

That set me thinking about how important the entire public edifice of law and order is to a sense of personal security and well-being, echoing the traditional Jewish teaching that one of the basic requirements for a decent society is not just respect for life and property and family – and for that matter animal welfare – but also a system of justice.

We only need to look round the world at the places where power or wealth or nepotism or patronage really pull the strings to see the importance of the rule of law. Justice is about a level playing field, about fairness and proportionality and respect. If the loser doesn't have a fair hearing or doesn't understand the reasons for the verdict, then justice has not been seen to be done. So one interpretation of the biblical verse, "Justice, justice shall you pursue", is that that double "justice" implies that, until the verdict, both sides deserve equal respect.