

# **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities**

## **Current Activities Report**

**AGM 7 June 2009**

### **Scottish Parliament and Government**

SCoJeC continues to monitor activity in the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government on a daily basis. We forward relevant information to a wide range of Scottish communal organisations including Jewish Care, Cosgrove Care, Calderwood Lodge, Calderwood Jewish Education and the students, and to UK bodies including the Board of Deputies, CST, the "Antisemitism Coordinating Unit", Shechitah UK, and other interested bodies, and we also brief them as necessary on, for example, relevant 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 Care organisations, the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, and the Israel Information Office, which have been able to provide information on specific issues.

### **Security**

a) SCoJeC, together with the CST, met the Scottish Government and Police at the Scottish Government's request to discuss the current increase in antisemitic activity. They were evidently shocked by the nature of recent incidents, and expressed concern that vulnerable members of the community, especially students and those in rural areas, now feel under threat, and undertook to draw the attention of relevant local authorities and police forces to increased needs of the community.

### **Post Mortems**

We have had a number of informal discussions with the Lord Advocate, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, the Procurator Fiscal service, MSPs, and health professionals, with a view to introducing MRI scanning as an acceptable alternative to surgical post mortem. This has been very successful in the Manchester area where the number of surgical post mortems in the Jewish community has fallen from around sixty to around three a year, and we have also been in discussion with relevant members of the Manchester Jewish community, and with local coroners who are very supportive of the scheme (which Jack Straw has announced that he hopes to extend throughout England and Wales). Our initial approaches have been very favourably received, and we are discussing with the Scottish Government how best to progress the matter.

### **Census**

At the request of the Scottish Government, SCoJeC attended a meeting with the Registrar General and the Equality Unit to discuss Scottish Government proposals for ethnicity classifications to be used in the 2011 census. We are not alone in remaining dissatisfied with the decision to use classifications that were found wanting

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by their own research, and will press the point with the Parliamentary committee which will make the final decision.

### **Disclosure**

a) SCoJeC is represented on one of the Scottish Government consultative groups advising on the secondary legislation for the Protection of Vulnerable Groups Act, which will make wide-reaching changes to the "Disclosure" system for people working with children and vulnerable (or "protected") adults, and was also a member of a Scottish Government short-term working group advising on new guidance for the current Disclosure system.

b) SCoJeC raised a number of issues with the Minister for Children and Early Years about new secondary legislation for Disclosure. As a result, all of these issues have been explicitly addressed in the associated Guidance document.

### **Circumcision**

SCoJeC was invited to participate in a meeting between the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Nicola Sturgeon, Bashir Ahmad MSP, and representatives of the Muslim community, to explain how the Jewish community provides for brit milah and the role of the Initiation Society.

### **CST antisemitism statistics**

At the request of the CST, SCoJeC circulated the mid-year antisemitism statistics to MSPs, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre, and the Scottish Government Equality Unit. Several MSPs requested information about Scotland-specific figures that were provided by CST and SCoJeC.

### **Time for Reflection**

In response to a request from the Presiding Officer's office, SCoJeC recommended Rabbi Nancy Morris as an appropriate Jewish speaker at "Time for Reflection". In consequence of that advice, Rabbi Morris addressed the Scottish Parliament on 25 June 2008.

### **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.

### **Consultation Responses**

We have responded to consultations on a wide range of issues (full list attached), and would like to thank the many individuals and communal organisations whose expertise has contributed to these responses. All consultation responses are available online at <http://www.scojec.org/consultations/consultations.html>, and information about consultation responses in process of preparation is available at [http://www.scojec.org/members/current\\_consultations/current\\_consultations.html](http://www.scojec.org/members/current_consultations/current_consultations.html)

## **Scotland Office**

SCoJeC arranged a meeting at Garnethill Synagogue between the Secretary of State for Scotland and the leaders of the various Scottish Jewish communities and communal organisations. The meeting also included a tour of the newly refurbished Archive Centre.

SCoJeC was invited by the Secretary of State to a small meeting at the Scotland Office to discuss the effect of the economic crisis on faith communities. Also present were Archbishop Conti, Ian Galloway (Convener, Church of Scotland Church and Society Council), and Shafi Kausar (Glasgow Central Mosque).

At the initiative of the Scottish Secretary, SCoJeC is a signatory to a Scotland Office statement recognising that a low turnout in the European Parliament elections may benefit extremist parties, and supporting an initiative to encourage voter registration and participation in the ballot.

## **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. We also, at their request, administer Disclosure applications for the Scottish Interfaith Council, BEMIS, and the Scottish-Iranian Association.

We attend regular meetings with the CRBS and the Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group to discuss issues around Disclosure and to share information and expertise.

### **UK Border Agency**

SCoJeC has registered as a sponsor in order to assist communal organisations that wish to employ individuals (paid or as a volunteer) from outwith the European Economic Area. There is no other route by which such individuals can enter the UK – even a rabbi who comes to Scotland to officiate at a single wedding must qualify under this scheme in order to obtain a visa. This is a significant service to communal organisations, who would otherwise have to register separately, with associated costs and other risks. We have already discovered how complex the new system is, but we trust that as we gain expertise, we will be able to advise and assist organisations to obtain visas for foreign workers.

### **Jewish Leadership Council: Political Affairs Brief**

A consortium that includes the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council has commissioned SCoJeC to produce a daily digest of political matters affecting the Jewish community. This covers activity in the UK and Scottish Parliaments and

Governments, the Welsh Assembly and Assembly Government, and the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

### **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 with the last Moderator and the Principal Clerk, both of whom also participated in last summer's Interfaith Pilgrimage.

### **STUC**

SCoJeC has held a number of bilateral meetings with the STUC to discuss matters of mutual concern, and once again contributed a short message to its annual anti-racism brochure. We held a special meeting to discuss the report of their delegation to Israel and Palestine, and its proposal for "Boycott, Disinvestment, and Sanctions", and were very disappointed that the proposal was adopted by Congress without dissent. We have made clear to the STUC that while we do not believe they are motivated by any personal antisemitic prejudice, they have failed to take account of the effect of their policy on members of the Jewish Community.

### **BEMIS**

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

## **Externally Funded Projects**

### **Outreach**

Leaflets and posters have been distributed to all libraries in Scotland, and we have responded to subsequent e-mails and phonecalls from isolated Jewish individuals wanting contact with the Jewish community. All of these have been sent back-issues of *Four Corners*, added to the mailing list for future issues, and, where possible, have been put in touch with other local Jewish people.

We have also written to communal organisations inviting them to bid for a share of our grant funding for collaborative projects that will reach out to isolated individuals outside the mainstream community. Several applications have been received and a decision will be made shortly after the AGM, with a view to projects commencing in the autumn.

### **Scotland's Jews**

*Scotland's Jews*, which was launched by the then Communities Minister, Stewart Maxwell, after last year's AGM, has now been distributed to all MSPs and all public libraries and schools in Scotland, and we are about to begin distribution to independent schools, the NHS and Police.

## **Interfaith pilgrimage**

The interfaith pilgrimage to Israel was organised as part of an initiative to increase understanding and friendship between communities in Scotland. The idea grew out of a conversation between SCoJeC Director Ephraim Borowski, and Rami Ousta, CEO of BEMIS, the umbrella organisation for minority community organisations in Scotland, who were concerned that tensions in the Middle East may sometimes be an obstacle to the development of good relations locally. The Very Reverend Dr Finlay Macdonald, principal clerk and former Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and Na'eem Raza, Director of Meem, a diversity training organisation, both joined the steering group, and around thirty people from seven different faith communities were invited to participate in the trip, which took place at the beginning of July.

We received very positive feedback about the pilgrimage both from participants and from people who either met the group in Israel or else read about it online (see [http://www.scojec.org/events/2008/08vii\\_pilgrimage/menu.html](http://www.scojec.org/events/2008/08vii_pilgrimage/menu.html)) or in the media. In addition to the informal feedback of pilgrims' "reflections" we carried out an online survey in order to gather more formal feedback for a report to funders and to provide information for planning future trips. Participants expressed extremely positive views about the pilgrimage, and are keen to use their experiences to promote good community relations in Scotland. Many have given talks or held meetings about it either with members of their own or other communities, and a question-time panel, organised jointly with GJRC, took place in March. This was chaired by Lesley Riddoch and recorded for broadcast by BBC Scotland.

However, following the failure of an attempt by the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign to have Christian participants boycott the Pilgrimage, which they described, in advance of any information about the itinerary as "cynical Zionist propaganda", Mick Napier published a lengthy, and extremely vitriolic condemnation of the pilgrimage on the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign website, in which he criticises several participants by name both personally and for their diary entries and reflections which were published on the SCoJeC website. In particular he refers to Fiona and Howard Brodie as "the features of hardened Zionism", and uses "Jews" and "Israelis" interchangeably.

## **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 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.

MEMO+ is an occasional publication that provides more in-depth information about particular issues, such as this week's European Parliament elections.

### **Four Corners**

*Four Corners* 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.

### **Other Activities**

#### **Supporting individuals and communities**

SCoJeC liaised with the CST, police, Jewish communities, and individuals in relation to security and antisemitic incidents resulting from the situation in Gaza. In particular, we provided a listening ear and reassurance for people from the smaller communities and isolated individuals in rural areas who have been victims of antisemitic incidents, or who are apprehensive that they may be.

In collaboration with the Chaplaincy, SCoJeC also provided support and information for students responding to campus “occupations”, boycott motions, etc.

### **Public Resource**

#### **Website (www.scojec.org)**

The website continues to be extremely well-used, with around 1500 unique visitors each month, viewing a total of around 16 500 pages. The "Guide to Jewish Facilities in Scotland" is particularly popular, as are *Scotland's Jews*, *Four Corners*, and MEMO.

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

Ephraim Borowski  
Leah Granat

June 2009

## **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.scojec.org/consultations/consultations.html>

Animal Slaughter without pre-stunning (*Scottish Parliament*)

Inquiry into the Public Petitions Process (*Scottish Parliament*)

The Governance of Britain: Election Day Weekend Voting (*UK Government*)

Proposed European Commission Council Regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing (*Scottish Government*)

Curriculum for Excellence: Religious and Moral Education Experiences and Outcomes (*Learning and Teaching Scotland*)

Draft Arbitration (Scotland) Bill (*Scottish Government*)

Health in our Multi-Ethnic Scotland: Future Research Priorities (*NHS Health Scotland*)

Monitoring of cross border charities (*Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator*)

Jewish Women: Looking Backwards ... Looking Forward (*Board of Deputies*)

End of Life Choices Bill (*Scottish Parliament proposed Member's Bill*)

Call for views on a boycott of Israel (*Scottish Trades Union Congress*)

Surface Drainage Charging (*Scottish Government*)

Criminal Justice and Licensing Bill (*Scottish Parliament*)

Commission Proposal to Replace Directive 93/119 with a Regulation on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Killing (*Scottish Government*)

## **Events since the last AGM**

### **September 2008**

"Challenging Relationships in our Time"  
*(in association with Women in the Jewish Community)*

### **October 2008**

Succot Party (St Andrews)

### **December 2008**

Consultation meetings: "Jewish Women: Looking Backwards ...Looking Forward"  
Edinburgh *(in association with Edinburgh Literary Society)*  
Dundee  
Lochgilphead

Chanukah Parties  
Dundee  
Lochgilphead

### **January 2009**

Visit by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy

### **February 2009**

Visit by Archbishop Mario Conti

### **March 2009**

BBC Scotland Riddoch Questions  
*(in association with Glasgow Jewish Representative Council)*

### **March 2009**

Purim Party (Dundee)

## **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

Cross Party Group on Human Rights  
Cross Party Group on Race Equality  
NHS Lanarkshire Spiritual Care Steering Group  
NES Spiritual Care Co-ordinating Committee  
Strathclyde Police Lay Advisory Group  
Central Police Diversity Advisory Group  
Church of Scotland  
STUC  
BEMIS  
BEMIS/Equality Network: INclusion  
Scottish Inter-Faith Council  
Interfaith Group on Domestic Abuse  
Ethnic Minority Civic Congress  
Churches Parliamentary Officer meetings  
Policy Officers Network  
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office briefings  
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**

SEMPER conference: Ten years on from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report  
EHRC Expert Seminar on Religion and Belief  
Scottish Government Equality Unit  
SCVO Equalities Co-ordinating Group  
STUC Congress  
Learning and Teaching Scotland  
BEMIS/STUC conference: Equality at Work  
Scottish Government Community Safety Unit  
Scottish Museums Council: consultation on museums and faith communities  
NES launch of spiritual care guidance  
Trinity Forum  
Central Police Equality seminar  
CST telephone conference  
EMLC Conference: Points-Based Immigration System  
Consultation on the proposed End of Life Choices Bill  
Scotland Office: faith communities and the current economic crisis  
Holocaust Memorial Day: Scottish event  
Holocaust Memorial Day: Scottish Parliament event  
Centre for Interfaith Studies lecture  
Edinburgh Interfaith Association: lecture by Alex Salmond  
Strathclyde Police  
Israeli Embassy telephone briefings  
Roshni  
"Inspirational Harmony"  
Voluntary Action Fund  
Government Equalities Office: Equalities Bill and EU Equality Regulation  
SIF Conference "Scottish Muslim Futures"  
STUC Women's Conference  
Charles Kennedy Question Time  
OneVoice Glasgow launch  
Diocese of Glasgow Interfaith Dialogue meeting  
OSCR Conference  
Anne Frank Trust  
EHRC: 2011 Census  
NHS conference: "Health in our ethnic-minority Scotland: a research strategy"  
Conference "Sharing Experience - Sharing Concern"  
Parliamentary Reception for Hannah Frank  
SCPO lecture  
UK Border Agency: Points-Based Immigration System  
Home Office: Points-Based Immigration System  
OCPAS launch: "Diversity Delivers"  
EHRC Faith Communities Round Table  
NHS Conference "Mental Health and Minority Faith Communities"  
General Register Office in Scotland  
"Women Thinking Equality"  
Gaelic TV Programme Planning  
Scottish Islamic Foundation launch