Rosh HaShanah Message from the First Minister

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Scottish Government and the people of Scotland, to wish you all *"Shanah tovah umetukah"*, a good and sweet year.

Rosh Hashanah is a solemn occasion, a time of introspection and reflecting both personally and communally on the achievements of the past year and on the challenges of the year to come. It is also the perfect occasion for all Scots to reflect on the rich contribution Scotland's Jewish communities have made to our nation.

… I hope that all your prayers for a peaceful, prosperous, successful and sweet year are heard and answered: *"Ketiva ve-chatima tovah"* …

SCoJeC
Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
annual
UPDATE
OCTOBER 2011

Being Jewish in Scotland

SCoJeC has been awarded a grant by the Scottish Government for a short study of the varied experiences of Jewish people throughout Scotland. This aims to find out more about the experience of Jewish people from urban and rural areas, including island communities, whatever their religious affiliation, and will help to build a better understanding of what affects the sense of security of Jewish individuals and communities.

ABOVE, SCoJeC FACILITATED A SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MEETING ON "BEING JEWISH IN SCOTLAND" IN NEWTON MEARNS.

We want to hear from YOU!

Please contact us if you would like to attend a focus group or help to arrange one in your area, or to arrange a one-to-one discussion. We will also be happy to receive your letters and e-mails telling us about your experiences of and feelings about being Jewish in Scotland.

"Home is not just a place, it's the people"

Discussions last year between SCoJeC and the Scottish Refugee Council resulted in three events during Refugee Week in partnership with the Association of Jewish Refugees, the Jewish Archives Centre, and Glasgow Jewish Representative Council.

Courage: 60 Years of the UN Refugee Convention features Rosa Sacharin, who came to Britain as a child refugee from Nazi Germany, and Christian Kasubandi, a refugee from war in the Congo, talking about their experiences and the contribution they have made and hope to make to their adopted country.

Some Words for Home is based on conversations with Kindertransport refugees Henry and Ingrid Wuga, and explores the small everyday detail of building a new life. Their experiences also featured in the exhibition *Refugee Stories at the Kelvingrove*, which included film, newspaper articles, and photographs illustrating their lives. Watch *Courage* at:

www.scojec.org/news/2011/11vi_src/src.html

Meetings with Ministers

During the last year SCoJeC has met Ministers and MSPs to discuss a wide range of issues of relevance to the Jewish Community. These included the Minister for Community Safety to discuss the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Bill, which covers threats intended to incite religious hatred.

We met the Education Secretary to discuss serious incidents that had taken place in Scottish universities. We also discussed the repudiation by the University and Colleges Union of the European Union definition of antisemitism, and thereby in effect the McPherson principle that "a racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person".

As head of the prosecution service, the Lord Advocate reaffirmed their commitment to tackle antisemitism, and commended the Sheriff who convicted a St Andrews University student of "racially aggravated" conduct for not being distracted or intimidated by the political protests inside and outside the court, and ruling that attacking a Jewish student in his own room and damaging his property could never be, as the aggressor claimed, merely "legitimate protest". The Lord Advocate offered to meet the Community to make clear his belief that antisemitism must be tackled as vigorously as sectarianism and other hate crime.

We discussed a wide range of issues with the Secretary of State for Scotland, including concerns about the proposal before the European Parliament to label meat from animals not pre-stunned before slaughter, but not from the hugely larger number of animals that are not effectively stunned.

FROM TOP: MEETING THE LORD ADVOCATE, FRANK MULHOLLAND, THE MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM, THE CABINET SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING, MIKE RUSSELL, AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND, MICHAEL MOORE.

SCoJeC Four Resign From University Union

Four senior members of SCoJeC, including the Chair and Director, all lifelong members of the University and College Union (UCU) and its predecessors, joined many other Jewish academics in resigning after the Union repudiated the definition of antisemitism proposed by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, on the grounds that it regards certain kinds of criticism of Israel, such as using traditional antisemitic stereotypes, as antisemitic.

SCoJeC does not take a position on matters relating to Israel unless they impinge on Jewish people in Scotland. The UCU decision does just that. Jewish students and the Jewish student Chaplain told the SCoJeC AGM about their experiences of clearly antisemitic incidents masquerading as anti-Zionism on a number of Scottish campuses, and reported that the hostility experienced by students is discouraging them from getting involved in Jewish activities. There was concern that the UCU decision could deter academics from offering support to students when they are attacked. Consequently, a special meeting of the Council unanimously approved their resignation on the grounds that "membership is incompatible with holding a representative position in the Community".

“The New Antisemitism”?

This year's CST antisemitic incident report showed a welcome decrease from the previous all-time high. However, a number of Scottish incidents this year give cause for concern, including the widely publicised attack on a Jewish student in St Andrews for which a fellow student was convicted and expelled. And there has been widespread outrage about antisemitic comments on the "Welcome to Israel only kidding you're in Giffnock" Facebook Group, and an article by Tom Shields in the Herald under the headline "If Giffnock was Gaza".

What links these and other incidents is what the Chief Rabbi calls the “new antisemitism” – blaming the local Jewish community for the actions of the Israeli government. The attacker in St Andrews claimed his actions were "legitimate protest" because his victim had decorated his bedroom wall with an Israeli flag; Shields imagines he is exonerating himself when he writes, "I chose Newton Mearns and Giffnock because they are the parts of Scotland with probably the highest level of support and approval of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory." One wonders how he knows that – has he conducted a poll, or is he presuming a certain identity? Is it not the same identity that the outrageous Facebook page presumed? The fact that it's a bit more literate doesn't detract from its hatefulness, and his references to Waitrose, private schools, and house prices simply show that he, just like the racial attacker in St Andrews, can't resist another age-old stereotype. While he may not himself be inciting violence, he is literally pointing the way for those who do.

The View from Abroad

Brazilian Jewish community leader and magazine editor, Ronaldo Hazan da Gomlevsky, was so impressed by his recent visit to Scotland and our community that he described it as "a trip to paradise".

Twice a year he visits another Jewish community to write about it for a special edition of Menorah magazine. SCoJeC was delighted to facilitate his visit, and arranged for him to visit 25 organisations and meet a wide cross-section of the community from Glasgow to Aberdeen. Ronaldo wrote, “I spent twelve unforgettable days, meeting Jewish people in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, and St. Andrews, and taking photos of so many different places. I was present at the festivities of Yom HaAtzmaut and at the Yom HaZikaron memorial service. I talked with Orthodox and Reform rabbis, the Chief Executives of the welfare organisations, with communal leaders, teachers, and students, and was welcomed into your homes. It is engraved in my heart as one of the most fantastic experiences I have had in all my travels through more than 80 countries. This trip was one of the most pleasant in all my life as a journalist.”

“Government could damage your organisation”

SCoJeC’s third annual briefing for communal organisations on changes to legislation that could impact on the community was attended by nearly 30 representatives from more than 20 communal organisations. Presentations included the new “Protection of Vulnerable Groups” scheme that has replaced the old “Disclosure” system, Charity Law, including the new legal status of Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIOs), and the new Certification of Death Act, which stipulates that a quarter of all deaths will be randomly selected for review. Although there is a provision in the Act to allow relatives to apply for registration and burial to proceed in parallel with the review, some burials will inevitably be delayed. SCoJeC been invited to sit on the consultative group for the new legislation, and will therefore be able to ensure that the community’s concerns are addressed. We will keep the community fully informed about next year’s pilot of the new rules.

Kirking of the Scottish Parliament

On the evening before the first sitting of the new Scottish Parliament, SCoJeC Director Ephraim Borowski contributed a specially-composed prayer in Hebrew and English to the "Kirking" of the new Parliament in St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, in the presence of Prince Edward, the First Minister, the leaders of the other parties, and representatives of all sections of public life in Scotland. The genuinely interfaith event also heard contributions from Archbishop Mario Conti, an Imam, the Church of Scotland Moderator, and the Primus of the Episcopal Church.

The Jewish Community was also represented by Ephraim and Leah Granat, SCoJeC Deputy Director, at the reception in Parliament Hall after the service, a valuable opportunity to congratulate new and returned MSPs and renew acquaintanceship with representatives of other faith communities and leaders of civil society in Scotland with whom we have had dealings over the past decade.

O Ruler of the Universe, from whom derives the authority of earthly rulers and governments, may You bless this new Parliament and all who have been elected to serve in it.

We pray, O Lord, that You bestow Your mercy upon our rulers, so that they act with justice and righteousness at all times. Put a spirit of wisdom and understanding into their hearts, and into the hearts of all their advisers, so that they uphold the peace of the nation, advance the welfare of its people, and deal kindly and truly with all who abide here.

Our Father in heaven, grant peace, tranquillity and harmony to us, and to all who dwell in our country so that they shall not be afraid.

May this be Your will, and let us say Amen.

Lord Winston launches educational software

The online version of the highly successful *Jewish Way of Life* software on the SCoJeC website was launched by Lord Robert Winston, providing convenient access for teachers and pupils. Lord Winston, who features in the resource, said "It is a great pleasure to be associated with this latest development of the exhibition with which my late mother was so closely associated, and I congratulate the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities for bringing this to fruition."

The Education Secretary, Michael Russell, was unable to attend due to illness, but was represented by Stewart Stevenson MSP, and sent his good wishes, saying: "It is important for us to recognise what an important tool education is for tackling discrimination and promoting equality and cultural awareness. I am delighted to see the development of resources such as *The Jewish Way of Life* that will help achieve these goals, and provide the skills to learn, understand and respect the value of different values and beliefs and make a better future for all of society."

To see the resource visit:
www.scojec.org/resources/jwol/jwol.html

In Our Time

SCoJeC sponsored an interfaith symposium jointly with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Glasgow, to mark the 45th anniversary of Nostra Aetate ("In our time"), the ground-breaking declaration by Pope John XXIII following the Second Vatican Council, that set the scene for a complete transformation of relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish Community.

The key-note speakers were Chief Rabbi David Rosen, and Catholic scholar, Fr John Pawlikowski.

© THE SCOTTISH COUNCIL OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES (SCoJeC) SCOTTISH CHARITY SC029438