



**Scottish Council of  
Jewish Communities**

# SCOJeC UPDATE

**OCTOBER 2008**

SCOJeC owes much of its success to links that we have forged with MSPs and government ministers. Our Director, Ephraim Borowski, and Public Affairs Officer, Leah Granat, assiduously monitor the activities of the Scottish parliament, speaking to MSPs and officials whenever the opportunity arises. Our efforts also benefit other faiths and ethnic minorities since relevant information is passed on to them. When Ephraim recently received his well-deserved MBE, many of those congratulating him were from outside our community, showing the goodwill that accrues and greatly benefits our community.

You may not be aware of much of our work because it is focussed on Parliament and those who live outside the main centres of Jewish life in Scotland. However, as you will read, these activities are important for the continued welfare of the whole Jewish community in Scotland - and we need your moral and financial support to ensure the continuation of our success.

DR WALTER SNEADER, SCOJeC CHAIR



*Community Minister  
Stewart Maxwell with SCOJeC  
Chair Walter Sneider and  
the authors, at the  
launch of Scotland's Jews.*

## Recent Activities

### ■ Countering threats to shechitah

There have been two attacks on shechitah this year, one in a parliamentary question, and the other a petition from a member of the public. SCOJeC briefed the relevant Scottish Government Minister, and also explained its importance to the Parliament's Public Petitions Committee. The petition was supported by a number of animal rights organisations, but the Committee decided that no action should be taken, and the Scottish Government has confirmed that shechitah is, and will remain legal in Scotland.



■ During a visit arranged by SCOJeC, the First Minister, Alex Salmond, went to Calderwood Lodge Primary School and also attended a meeting with leaders of communal organisations.

■ We are in discussion with the Home Office and UK Borders Agency about how to alleviate the detrimental effects of the new "points-based" immigration system on the Community.

■ SCOJeC's popular online Guide to Jewish Facilities in Scotland provides information about the community for people visiting Scotland.  
<http://www.scojec.org/communities/guidebook.pdf>



**www.scojec.org**



## ■ Scottish Interfaith Pilgrimage

SCoJeC was instrumental in organising an interfaith pilgrimage to Israel 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.

More than thirty people from seven different faiths participated in the pilgrimage, which included a walking tour of the Old City stopping at the Western Wall, the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; visits to the Baha'i Shrine in Haifa, Christian places of pilgrimage in the Galilee, and Yad Vashem; meetings with Israeli and Palestinian politicians in the Knesset and the Palestinian capital, Ramallah; prayers at the Great Synagogue, the Al Aqsa mosque, and the Scottish Church in Jerusalem; a Seudah Shlishit with Chief Rabbi David Rosen; and a remarkable panel of Jerusalem clerics from several faith traditions, who surprisingly had never before met. For more details see

[http://www.scojec.org/events/2008/08vii\\_pilgrimage/menu.html](http://www.scojec.org/events/2008/08vii_pilgrimage/menu.html)

### *More of our recent activities....*

■ *There is ample evidence that consultations are not merely paper exercises but do affect the direction of policy. Examples of particular interest to synagogues and other communal organisations that own premises, are significant improvements to proposed Fire Safety regulations that could have made communal activities virtually impossible, and the extension until 2014 of the water charge exemption which benefits small charities and faith community organisations.*

*The first of these was due almost entirely to SCoJeC's intervention, and the latter due to the efforts of an informal coalition of voluntary sector organisations in which SCoJeC played a major role.*

■ *By acting as the Registered Body for the entire community, SCoJeC continues to help communal organisations meet the requirements of Child Protection legislation, whilst enabling volunteers to work with communal organisations with the minimum of administrative red tape. We also act, at their request, for the Scottish Interfaith Council, BEMIS, and the Scottish-Iranian Association.*

## Complaint to the Press Complaints Commission

In response to the significant increase in antisemitic contributions to the online discussion forums on the Scotsman and Herald websites, SCoJeC complained to both the Press Complaints Commission and the police, and wrote to MSPs inviting them to condemn this trend and use their influence to reverse it. It is absolutely clear that the comments bear no relation to the news reports which they purport to discuss, and can have no purpose other than to foment hatred of Jewish people in general. The hosting of such unacceptable views by respectable newspapers gives them legitimacy and undermines efforts to make the rhetoric of hatred unacceptable in the public forum.

"jews  
are not fit  
to breathe our  
air. They must be  
attacked wherever you  
see them; throw rocks at  
their ugly, hooked nosed  
women and mentally ill  
children, and light up  
the REAL ovens."

(“BINNY” IN SCOTSMAN)

The Press Complaints Commission replied that these pejorative comments were outwith their remit since they refer to Jewish people in general rather than to individuals, but they did confirm that this is a matter for the police. The police are currently investigating the possibility of prosecuting both the newspapers and the authors of the offensive comments.

Most encouragingly, the response from MSPs expressing outrage that reputable newspapers did not prevent the publication of blatantly antisemitic comments was overwhelming. Many have written to the editors to express their abhorrence at the comments, and several have written to the Justice Minister to enquire whether there may be a legislative solution, and a supportive motion was tabled in the Scottish Parliament.

■ *We have discussed concerns about lack of funding for school visits to Auschwitz with the Holocaust Education Trust, Ministers, and MSPs.*

■ *At the request of the CST, we circulated the current antisemitism statistics to MSPs and others.*

■ *We met the Registrar General to discuss concerns about his proposals for the ethnicity classifications in the next census.*

■ *We have been invited to brief the Muslim community on Jewish arrangements for circumcision, and to attend their meeting with health ministers.*



■ *SCoJeC organised a Chanukah party in Dundee, a Purim Megillah reading and shabbaton in Aberdeen, and is currently planning a Succot event.*

■ *We have had very positive discussions with the Lord Advocate, Ministers, the Procurator Fiscal service, MSPs, and health professionals about replacing surgical post-mortems with MRI scans.*

■ *We met the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland and discussed opportunities for joint working on issues of mutual concern.*

# More about SCoJeC

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges. Its aims are to advance public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community. SCoJeC works with others to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality, and represents the Jewish community in Scotland to government and other bodies on matters affecting the community.

For more information see  
**[www.scojec.org](http://www.scojec.org)**

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THE SCOTTISH COUNCIL OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES  
(SCoJeC) IS SCOTTISH CHARITY SCO29438

SCoJeC has recently been awarded £100,000 by the Scottish Government to develop an ambitious three-year programme both within the Jewish Community and to promote good community relations. The grant can only be used for the projects the Government agreed to support, and not for our core activities. These are:

- continuing to produce MEMO, a weekly digest of information of relevance to ethnic minority communities;
- extending and developing the Outreach project, aimed at contacting and involving isolated Jewish individuals in rural Scotland;
- spreading the positive messages of the recent very successful Scottish Interfaith Pilgrimage, and the development of future such activities;
- developing a Scottish version of the Jewish Way of Life Exhibition to inform schools about Judaism.

SCoJeC recently published a new and greatly expanded edition of *Scotland's Jews* by Kenneth Collins with new material by Ephraim Borowski and Leah Granat. The book has forewords from the Chief Rabbi and the First Minister, and includes information about the contemporary community, Jewish issues in employment, health and other contexts, demography, and an illustrated guide to John Clark's celebrated stained glass windows which were commissioned for Queens Park Synagogue, and are now housed in Giffnock Synagogue.

AVAILABLE FROM SCoJeC, £6.00 INC P&P

