



# SCOJeC

**Scottish Council of  
Jewish Communities**

*Annual Report &*

# UPDATE

# 2013

## ● ***Shanah Tovah* from the First Minister**

"It gives me great pleasure on behalf of the Scottish Government and the people of Scotland, to wish you all '*shanah tovah*', and to express again my appreciation for the valuable contribution that the Jewish Community make to Scotland.

Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, high holy days at the beginning of the Jewish year, commemorate the creation of the world and are days of judgement.

The festivals provide an opportunity for self-examination and repentance; for reflection upon the achievements of the past and your hopes for the future; and for the symbolic casting off of wrongs into the depths of the sea. It's a time for new beginnings.



**The Scottish  
Government**

As you come together to worship, I wish you all '*shanah tovah umetukah*' – a good and sweet new year."



## ● **Hate Crime**

The Scottish Government announced a welcome decrease in intra-Christian sectarianism, with charges down from 862 to 587. However, for minority religions, it is a very different story.

The number of charges for "conduct derogatory to Judaism" nearly doubled from 14 to 27, and for "conduct derogatory to Islam" from 19 to 80 (though 57 charges related to a single Scottish Defence League march); relative to the sizes of the different communities, Muslims are almost 10 times, and Jews more than 20 times, as likely as Christians to be the victim of religious hatred.

Scotland as a whole is by no means hostile to Jewish people, but there is an undeniable trend in both attitude and action that must be acknowledged and challenged more openly by Government, the media, churches, trades unions, and others.

## ● **Solidarity with Muslim community**

SCOJeC issued a statement of solidarity with the Muslim community following the substantial increase in attacks on Muslims after the murder of Drummer Rigby in Woolwich. This was welcomed and endorsed by a wide range of organisations and individuals, including the Muslim Council of Scotland, "Tell Mama" (the Muslim equivalent of the CST), the Minister for External Affairs and International Development, and the Church of Scotland. It was also widely supported within the Jewish community. "I am very moved by the reaction to SCOJeC's statement", said one member of the Edinburgh community, "it gives me a stronger feeling of security, and lends credence to the saying 'united we stand, divided we fall'. Thank you SCOJeC."

To read the statement and a selection of responses, see [www.scojec.org/solidarity\\_2.html](http://www.scojec.org/solidarity_2.html)



## ● “A darn fine place to be a Jew”

The full report of SCoJeC’s Scottish Government funded *Being Jewish in Scotland* project, which explored the variety of experience of Jewish people in Scotland, is now available on our website at [www.scojec.org/bjisfindings.pdf](http://www.scojec.org/bjisfindings.pdf)

This was the first comprehensive study of what matters to Jewish people in Scotland, and the very act of investigating what Jewish people think is important has served to increase people’s feeling of belonging and sense of security. But our work is not complete.

We hope our recommendations will lead to new partnerships, dialogues, and activities, and to a greater understanding of the experience of Jewish people in Scotland.

We are fortunate to have been awarded a number of grants to enable us to start on this work:

### Inter-Links

was a short-term project that addressed some of the challenges faced by older Jewish people trying to keep in touch with friends and family outwith Scotland, and at the same time helped out-of-town students to integrate with the local community.

[www.scojec.org/inter-links.html](http://www.scojec.org/inter-links.html)

### CoNeCT

will enable us to link Jewish communities and individuals throughout Scotland by means of a new web-based discussion site and ‘e-learning’ space.

[www.scojec.org/connect.html](http://www.scojec.org/connect.html)

### YaChaS

(LinkUp: Israelis together in Scotland)

gives us an opportunity to pilot a range of activities for Israelis and people of Israeli heritage living in Scotland.

[www.scojec.org/yachas.html](http://www.scojec.org/yachas.html)



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## ● Church of Scotland

Relations with the Church of Scotland have unfortunately been strained since November, when we protested at their sponsorship of a conference at which the “keynote” speaker was Rev Stephen Sizer, a Church of England minister who has repeatedly associated himself with Holocaust denial, right wing extremism, and antisemitism.

In April, the Church’s Church and Society Council produced a document entitled “*The Inheritance of Abraham?*” which purported to be an analysis of the situation in the Middle East, but was a tendentious, biased polemic rather than a reasoned discussion of theology or politics, that presented Jews and Judaism as the problem and Christianity as the solution.

After we protested strongly, the Council of Christians and Jews brokered a meeting at which the Church agreed to make some revisions. However, these were minor, and did not remove the offensive material. We still hoped that the General Assembly would refer the report back to enable discussions with the Jewish community to take place, but they rejected an amendment explicitly calling for dialogue, and overwhelmingly approved the report.

SCoJeC deeply regrets that the Church of Scotland has deliberately and knowingly burnt its bridges with the Jewish Community. It will not be easy to rebuild them, but we are continuing to work to bring our communities together, rather than, as the Church’s report has done, driving us further apart.

## ● From the Borders to the Outer Isles



SCoJeC travelled the length and breadth of Scotland this year, holding events in Skye, Orkney, Shetland, Aberdeen, Pitlochry, Inverness, Lochgilphead, Oban, Lochaline, Maybole, Findhorn, Dundee, Glasgow, Dunoon, and Dalbeattie. These included films and discussions, a six stop Klezmer dance tour, a talk by a Jewish writer, Jewish art talks and gallery openings, a Purim party, and 'meet the artist' sessions!



## ● Supporting Students

SCoJeC, together with Scottish Jewish Student Chaplaincy and Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, met the Cabinet Secretary for Education, university authorities and the police, to discuss concerns about the atmosphere of intimidation on several campuses. At Edinburgh University, where Jewish students have left without completing their courses or turned down offered places, the university's response has been inadequate and insensitive. The Minister undertook to raise our concerns with the Principal, and assured us that "there is no right to intimidate and prevent free speech".

## ● New Public Affairs Officer

SCoJeC is pleased to announce the appointment of Nicola Livingston as our part time Public Affairs Officer. Nicola has worked professionally in local authority social work for over 30 years, as well as in a voluntary capacity in senior positions in a number of communal organisations.

Nicola said, "I am greatly looking forward to working with SCoJeC to ensure that issues of concern to Jewish people in Scotland are taken into account by public bodies in their strategic planning."

SCoJeC Director, Ephraim Borowski commented, "Nicola's experience in community development and her passion for maintaining a strong and active Jewish community in Scotland will be a huge asset, and we are delighted to welcome her to our team."



## ● Disproportion in the Scottish Parliament

Since the last Scottish Parliament election, 35 of the c.170 Members' Motions about foreign countries have been about Israel; Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan tie for second place with eight each. More than 80% of respondents to our *Being Jewish in Scotland* project spontaneously mentioned the impact Scottish attitudes to Israel have on their daily life, and we have raised their concerns with MSPs.





## It's a hit!

SCJeC's website is ever more popular! We received more than half a million 'hits' in 2012, and already more than 400,000 in the first eight months of 2013. We have been told that it's *"very interesting and impressive", "superb!", "comprehensive and easy to use"*. Popular pages include the

*Guide to Jewish Facilities in Scotland*, *Scotland's Jews*, *Four Corners*, a noticeboard of events of Jewish interest taking place all over Scotland, and *MEMO*, our weekly overview of information of interest to minority ethnic communities in Scotland.

So, if you aren't already a regular visitor, why not take a look now at [www.scojec.org](http://www.scojec.org), and tell us what you think!

## ● Ensuring the voice of the Jewish Community is heard

During the last year, SCJeC has responded to consultations on subjects as diverse as same-sex marriage, welfare reform, the census, and *shechitah*, and we continue to warn the Scottish Government that the new death certification regulations will inevitably cause funerals to be delayed, and to press for a more coherent and streamlined system.

To read our submissions see [www.scojec.org/consultations.html](http://www.scojec.org/consultations.html)

## ● AGM Headlines

SCJeC's accounts for 2012 show a total turnover of £111,865, generating a surplus of £10,133, of which £270 was attributable to general funds. The remainder is earmarked for Scottish Government and Lottery funded projects, and the "In the Frame" photography project.

Following the AGM in June, our Executive now consist of Hilary Rifkind (Edinburgh) as Chair, and Micheline Brannan (co-opted) as Vice-Chair, Nicola Livingston (Chaplaincy) as Hon Secretary, Walter Hecht (co-opted) as Hon Treasurer, and Frank House (Highlands) as representative of small communities. The President of the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, and Chair of the Management Committee of Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation are ex officio members of the Executive.

## ● Helping communal organisations to comply with regulations

SCJeC continues to act as an umbrella group to facilitate "**Protection of Vulnerable Groups Scheme**" ("Disclosure") checks for communal organisations that have employees or volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults, and we are also licensed under the UK Border Agency's "**Points Based System**" to sponsor communal employees and volunteers from outwith the European Economic Area. We passed a recent in-depth review by the Border Agency with flying colours; our category "A" status was renewed, and we are therefore pleased to be able to continue providing this service, which avoids the need for individual organisations to register separately with associated costs and other risks.



## ● It's easy to help!

Please help us to support and protect Jewish life in Scotland by making a donation. Just visit <https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/scojec>. Thank you!