

**All-Party Inquiry into Antisemitism
Response from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities**

The Jewish community in Scotland

There are Jewish people living across the whole of Scotland from the Borders to the Shetlands, but the majority live in the Central Belt, with the largest concentration in East Renfrewshire. In Scotland 6,500 people identified themselves as Jewish by religion in the 2001 census but research based on the Canadian census leads us to believe that the true figure could be as much as 28% higher. Outwith the communities of the Central Belt the majority of Jewish people live in rural areas, often at a considerable distance from the nearest synagogue and from communal services and resources.

Extent and Perception of Antisemitism in Scotland

There are fortunately fewer antisemitic incidents in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, but because of small numbers this may not be statistically significant. It has been documented that any media reporting of the Middle East – not necessarily of Israel or Palestine – results in an increase in the number of antisemitic incidents and in turn in Jewish people's perception of being threatened. The majority of people in the Scottish Jewish community have not curtailed their communal activities either religious or social as a result of this perception, but significant numbers say they do feel more apprehensive about attending religious services and events at known Jewish locations such as synagogues and community centres, and in particular about appearing visibly Jewish (e.g. by wearing a skullcap). Most Jewish organisations in Scotland have been advised by the police to take measures to improve security and, where financially possible, this has been done. Scottish Jewish people's perception of being at risk of an antisemitic attack is higher than the actual risk of being a victim. However this does not mean that the risk is imaginary. Antisemitic incidents are increasing and people are justifiably alarmed by this.

Historically inter-Christian sectarianism has been the most prevalent religious hatred in Scotland, and public discussion and policies tend to use 'sectarianism' as a blanket term for religious hatred. We believe this to be unhelpful, and have frequently been at pains to point out that sectarianism refers only to inter-Christian hatred and that it is important not to diminish the experience of other faiths by subsuming all religious hatred into sectarianism.

Understandably the Holocaust has shaped the way many Jewish people relate to the world. It is extremely unusual to encounter anyone in the Scottish Jewish community who did not lose at least one member of their family in the Holocaust, and often many more. Many in the Scottish Jewish community are first- or second-generation refugees and may as a result feel more vulnerable. We have already referred to the fact that they may be reluctant to identify themselves as Jewish on an official document such as a census form for fear of negative consequences, and it does not take a great deal of imagination to appreciate that the experience of seeing one's parents, children and siblings shot or sent to the gas chamber will have enduring effects on someone's psyche, feelings of security, behaviour etc.

This may result in some Jewish people reacting more strongly to a feeling of threat or vulnerability than would someone without that experience. This is emphatically not to say that they are over-sensitive nor that they see antisemitism where there is none.

Antisemitism and Criticism of the State of Israel

In common with Jewish people across the UK, members of the Scottish Jewish community hold as wide a variety of views about current Israeli politics as do non-Jewish people, and it is not difficult to find Jewish supporters of the Israeli far left, far right and every position in between.

Criticism of Israel as a state and of any particular Israeli government is entirely legitimate – as is criticism of the US, the UK or any other state. However, depending on the context criticism of Israel may sometimes be antisemitic. For example, whereas criticism of UK government policy is not taken to imply criticism of the existence of the UK, that is often not the case with regard to Israel. Similarly, there are security walls and fences in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Kashmir and Korea (to name but four) yet the Israeli security fence is the only one regularly referred to in the media.

Antisemitism does not consist only in violence, harassment or discrimination against individual Jews, but in treating Jews differently from others, whether as individuals or collectively. When Israel is singled out in this way and the only thing that distinguishes it from the other states is that it is a Jewish state, then that is an example of political antisemitism.

There is clear evidence of this when 'Israel' and 'Jewish' are confused so that what purports to be criticism of Israel becomes antisemitism. For example, during the recent rectorial election at Glasgow University the website of the Vanunu4Rector campaign followed the sentence 'Israel is still trying to silence Vanunu' in one paragraph with 'he has been assaulted by Jewish extremists' in the next, and a student supporter of Vanunu campaigned with the slogan "Jews are evil".

Recent examples of antisemitism in Scotland

There are many incidents of antisemitism in Scotland, most of them thankfully minor. They do, however, contribute to increasing people's perception that Scottish society is becoming more antisemitic, and significantly raising the level of fear that people have of becoming a victim of an antisemitic incident. The following provides a sample of recent antisemitic incidents in Scotland.

- i) A man was recently convicted in Kilmarnock Sheriff Court of painting Nazi graffiti and shouting anti-Jewish abuse. His defence was that he had 'taken umbrage' against Israel.

- ii) Jewish people shopping in Glasgow city centre were approached by members of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign who asked them to sign a petition. When they declined to do so they were harangued and verbally abused and one lady was chased down the street eventually taking refuge in an indoor shopping centre.
- iii) A Jewish student has been 'hounded' for taking time off to observe the Jewish festivals and for refusing to sit exams on the Jewish Sabbath. She has also been told that 'since the university is a secular institution, it does not need to take any account of a student's religion' and that she is 'not doing you people any favours', since, as a result, the university will think twice about taking anyone with 'a Jewish name' in future.
- iv) A Jewish university lecturer was the subject of an extended antisemitic tirade from a student in the middle of a lecture. The university authorities subsequently asked the lecturer why he had upset the student.
- v) Students campaigning for the election of Mordechai Vanunu to the post of Rector of Glasgow University told students that "Israelis are evil. Jews are evil."
- vi) An internet directory providing information about local services in Dundee included both anti-Israel and antisemitic comments next to the address and contact details of the local synagogue under the heading of 'Jews'.
- vii) A member of the Dundee Jewish community recently commented that before coming to Dundee he had never been exposed to routine antisemitism and that many people in his community feel very vulnerable and do not want to put their heads above the parapet by identifying themselves as Jewish.
- viii) Antisemitic graffiti have appeared in various locations in Edinburgh, notably on a wall above the Scottish Parliament building on the same day that a Jewish charity that supports work in Israel was being discussed in the Parliament.
- ix) Two years ago there was an attempt to firebomb the Edinburgh synagogue.
- x) Jewish students have reported that they feel persecuted and insecure on campuses and that the situation has worsened in the last year. This results from publicity campaigns that demonise Jews by organisations such as the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign. A recent example is a poster depicting Orthodox Jews comparing nuclear missiles to 'Kosher Sausages'.

- xi)** A Jewish GP who has worked in an ethnically diverse area of Glasgow for many years, and who has enjoyed excellent relations with his patients, reports that a patient recently ended a consultation by asserting at some length that the GP was 'the representative of the Israeli government in Scotland' and was by implication responsible for the activities of the Israeli government with which the patient vehemently disagreed.
- xii)** A Jewish student has told us that she feels 'marked out' by other students because of her religion, and that she is generally introduced by them as 'the American Jew'. Some students have 'reassured' her that 'we don't see you as a Jew, you're just like one of us'.
- xiii)** A Jewish secondary school pupil wearing a skullcap was spat at in the street by an older teenager whilst other teenagers tried to grab his skullcap from his head.
- xiv)** Regular verbal abuse from people in passing cars towards people wearing Jewish dress, for example men wearing skullcaps.

Combating antisemitism

There is no simple answer to how antisemitism can be combated and a combination of responses has to be employed.

- i)** Although religious equality and race equality are equally important, the former generally receives far less recognition than the latter and fewer resources are generally made available to support it. In addition, where reference is made to religious equality, this is almost always in the area of sectarianism, which is strictly an intra-Christian phenomenon, whilst antisemitism is rarely mentioned. Antisemitism, Islamophobia and sectarianism should be recognised as different facets of the same phenomenon, and should all be included by name when any one of them is being condemned.
- ii)** Money may not be able to prevent the occurrence of antisemitic incidents, but it can contribute towards making people feel more secure and confident to go about their daily lives. Measures such as the installation of adequate security lighting, CCTV, entryphones etc can make an enormous difference to communal confidence as well as providing a deterrent to potential attackers. The small size of the Jewish communities in Scotland means that they do not have adequate funds to provide for this level of security and communal premises remain largely unprotected. The Scottish Executive provided funding some years ago, but this was limited and has not been repeated, so there remains considerable unmet need both in the Jewish Community and elsewhere. Given the deteriorating situation, a further tranche of funds would greatly assist.

- iii) Education is clearly a key contributor to reducing antisemitism and preventing antisemitic attacks. However, it will only be successful if teaching staff have received adequate training and if the materials employed are accurate and appropriate. To this end it is important that all materials should be prepared in co-operation with the Jewish community (or, in the case of Islamophobia with the Muslim community etc) so as to ensure that they do not unwittingly introduce or preserve falsehoods or perpetuate myths.
- iv) It is important that individuals have the confidence to report antisemitic incidents, and this will only happen if they see that reports are taken seriously and acted upon by the appropriate authorities. It is imperative that universities, businesses, the police etc all follow-up reports of antisemitism and endeavor to bring perpetrators to justice and thus to reassure victims.
- v) As long as religious hatred is not a specific offence in law it cannot be dealt with on an appropriate level in the courts. Legislating against religious hatred would send a strong message that it will not be tolerated and would enable the courts to respond more effectively than they are able to do at present.

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities 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.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.