



Connecting Scotland:
How the Scottish Government and its agencies engage internationally
Response from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. SCoJeC advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture, and community, by representing the Jewish community in Scotland to Government and other statutory and official bodies, liaising with Ministers, MSPs, Churches, Trades Unions, and others, and providing information and assistance to educational, health, and welfare organisations on matters affecting the Jewish community. SCoJeC also provides a support network for the smaller communities and individuals and families who live outwith any Jewish community, and assists organisations within the Scottish Jewish community to comply with various regulatory requirements. SCoJeC also promotes dialogue and understanding between the Jewish community and other communities in Scotland, and works in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to promote equality, good relations, and understanding among community groups.

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

Although foreign affairs are reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Government is rightly concerned with the effect of its international engagement strategy, and that of its public sector partners, on the Scottish economy and so on the wellbeing of the people of Scotland. Consequently, its strategy should be judged not only by the extent to which it has “enabled Scotland to flourish on the international stage”, but also by its impact in Scotland. It is our role to represent the interests of the Jewish Community in Scotland, so we have an obligation to speak when such policy has a negative impact on our community; we therefore wish to provide evidence about how the strategy, or the failure fully to realise the implications of the strategy, has differentially affected the Jewish Community in Scotland.

During 2012-13, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities carried out an inquiry, funded by the Scottish Government, into the experience of *Being Jewish in Scotland*. The findings¹ provide a comprehensive overview of what Jewish people in Scotland were thinking, feeling, and experiencing, and provided evidence that many Scottish people fail to make any differentiation between “local Jewish people” and “the actions of the State of Israel”.

¹ *Being Jewish in Scotland* (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, 2013)
http://www.scojec.org/news/2013/13ix_bjis/bjis.html

Comments included:

"I was at a party, I took my hat off and had a kippah [skullcap] on. The flatmate of a friend ... said 'so you like killing Palestinian children?'"

and

"I used to be proud to wear a kippah all the time, but when I lived in Edinburgh, was harassed several times by pro-Palestinians in Edinburgh city centre because of what is happening in Israel, and for refusing to take a leaflet from other protesters in Princes Street. Now, I do not feel safe to publicly wear a kippah."

Although SCoJeC does not normally comment on international affairs, we are bound to reflect the fact that the Jewish Community is affected by events in Israel, because the vast majority of Scottish Jews have friends or family living in Israel. A recent survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research² found that for 82% of the respondents, Israel plays an 'important' role in their Jewish identities, 76% feel that Israel is relevant to their day-to-day lives in Britain, and 72% categorise themselves as Zionists. These figures support our own finding that more than four fifths of participants in our *Being Jewish in Scotland* surveys mentioned Israel or Zionism without being prompted, and the conversation turned to Israel in all of our focus groups. Whatever their views of the situation in the Middle East, the vast majority reported discomfort with the undisputed increase in the volume and virulence of anti-Zionist activity in Scotland.

It is therefore a cause for concern to the Jewish Community that this disproportion may indirectly encourage antisemitism from those who conflate the local Jewish community with the State of Israel. This is not speculative. There was an unprecedented spike³ in reported antisemitic incidents in Scotland last summer. In the ten weeks from the beginning of July 2014, more than 50 incidents were reported to the police, of which some 60% were classed as crimes, compared with only 12 and 13 in the whole of the previous two years. Despite strong statements of reassurance from the then First Minister, the Lord Advocate, and the Chief Constable, the scale of these incidents has inevitably had a detrimental effect on the sense of security and well-being of the Jewish Community in Scotland, and the level of fear and anxiety being expressed by many people is far beyond anything we have previous experienced in Scotland.

Cultural Engagement

Scotland has thriving arts, culture, and sporting sectors that attract many international visitors and considerable consequent revenue. Beyond the statement made this summer by the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, who was quoted as saying⁴ *"I strongly believe in the freedom of expression, and I don't believe cultural boycotts are consistent with the rights of artists to the freedom of expression"*, there has, however, been no

² Committed, concerned and conciliatory: The attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel (Jewish Policy Research, 2010)

<http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Committed,%20concerned%20and%20conciliatory:%20The%20attitudes%20of%20Jews%20in%20Britain%20towards%20Israel.pdf>

³ Large Spike in Antisemitic Incidents in Scotland

http://www.scojec.org/news/2014/14viii_antisemitism/antisemitism.html

⁴ Hyslop rejects call of artists to cancel Israeli Fringe show

<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/hyslop-rejects-call-of-artists-to-cancel-israeli-fringe-show.24794630>

condemnation by the Scottish Government, or indeed the opposition parties, of repeated attempts to impose a boycott on visits by Israeli theatre companies⁵ and sports teams⁶, nor any visible attempts to encourage the Fringe organisers to resist this intimidation. This summer, for example, protests very publicly prevented two non-political theatre shows by Israeli companies from being staged at the Edinburgh Fringe. The level of intimidation, the number of demonstrators, and the discriminatory nature of the protests were reported by many people as inherently antisemitic. One Jewish family, including children, who had hoped to attend a performance were, for example, harassed with questions such as:

"How many babies did you slaughter today?"

and were subjected to taunts that:

"Your money is covered with Palestinian blood".

Worryingly, and despite an unequivocal public statement from the Chief Constable describing such incidents as "completely unacceptable"⁷, we were also told by members of the Edinburgh Jewish Community that although

"we were surrounded by police officers ... the feeling we got is that our security is not a top priority for the police".

Trade

There have been similar incidents this year in major shopping centres, one of which has told us that they were not able to maintain the increased security required by the sometimes violent protests⁸, and that the disruption to other traders, and loss of business resulting from customer intimidation, were unsustainable. As a result, we are aware of two outlets selling products manufactured in Israel that were forced to cease trading, and others advised us that they have also reluctantly stopped selling Israeli products. We have also been informed that some shopping centres have turned down applications from businesses owned by or employing Israelis, or that sell products manufactured in Israel, because they are apprehensive that the shopping centre, its staff and customers might become targets, and that some such businesses intend to advise colleagues not to consider opening outlets in Scotland.

As we have said, the majority of the Scottish Jewish community do feel an affinity with Israel, not least because they have friends or family living there, and we have been inundated by calls from people who have been made to feel vulnerable simply going about their daily lives. In addition, in another example of conflation, there have been repeated instances of anti-Israel stickers being placed on kosher food, rather than on any other products in

⁵ Edinburgh 'should be ashamed of Israeli boycott'
<http://www.scotsman.com/what-s-on/theatre-comedy-dance/edinburgh-should-be-ashamed-of-israeli-boycott-1-3507484>

⁶ 'A seriously uncomfortable afternoon' for Israel's sporting ambassadors in Scotland
<https://amateursport.wordpress.com/2012/06/18/a-seriously-uncomfortable-afternoon-for-israels-sporting-ambassadors-in-scotland/>

⁷ Chief Constable describes current surge in antisemitism as "completely unacceptable"
http://www.scojec.org/news/2014/14ix_antisemitism/antisemitism.html

⁸ Kedem staff member doused in 'burning' chemical in hate attack
<http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/125090/kedem-staff-member-doused-burning-chemical-hate-attack>

supermarkets. Although both the police and some local authorities have since intervened more effectively, the level of intimidation by the protesters, particularly against visibly Jewish people, the failure of the police initially to take decisive action against the perpetrators, and the complete absence of statements from either the Scottish Government or almost all national or local politicians condemning the intimidation, have all exacerbated the already unparalleled anxiety among many Jewish people.

A mother wrote:

"We are scared for our children's safety. We are now confining ourselves to our home more. We have instructed the children not to identify themselves as Jewish to anyone who doesn't already know. We fear the new school year. We fear bringing the children to cheder [Jewish religion classes]".

Most tellingly, the person who had previously told our *Being Jewish in Scotland* inquiry two years ago that "Scotland is a darn good place to be a Jew", now wrote,

"Feel alienated and no longer Scottish first, then Jewish. Feel Jewish only. Have to be very guarded when speaking to people. ... My son asked on Friday evening if we could leave Scotland."

Studying in Scotland

We have received similar reports from university and college students, where antisemitic incidents and online abuse, in some cases from social media 'friends', that frequently blame individual Jewish people for Israeli government policy, have created an atmosphere in which some students do not feel safe to reveal their Jewish identity. The extent of the abuse has been such that some Jewish students from overseas have left mid-course, and others have chosen not to return after graduating to take up opportunities for post-graduate study. The following comment, received from a former student is typical:

"I did NOT feel safe living [on campus]. People are unable to separate politics from ethnic identity and religion."

Because many of these instances have involved foreign students, their experience naturally becomes a matter of comment in their home countries, with the result that during the last few years, both we and Jewish Student Chaplaincy Scotland have observed a marked change in the questions asked by prospective students and their parents and academic advisors. Whereas previously we were only asked about access to Jewish facilities such as the availability of kosher food and proximity to the nearest synagogue, we are now only asked about the level of antisemitism and whether it is safe for Jewish students to live and study in Scotland.

Two particular examples that have had a significant negative impact on Scotland's reputation as a destination for visiting students were at St Andrews University. When a Jewish student was attacked in his own room for daring to have an Israeli flag on his wall, the assault, the trial in which his assailant was convicted of a racially aggravated offence, and the subsequent appeal, which was accompanied by aggressive demonstrations, all attracted significant international attention, especially in the United States⁹. The following year threats against

⁹ Will You Be Ready? Why We Cannot Afford to Overlook Chanan Reitblat's Story
<http://tinyurl.com/qco8ffz>

Enduring Anti-Israel Sentiment At St. Andrews

http://www.thejewishweek.com/features/lens/enduring_anti_israel_sentiment_st_andrews

hotels that had been booked for a student charity ball organised jointly between the local Jewish Student Society and the St Andrews chapter of the American Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity, on the grounds that one of the intended beneficiaries was an Israeli charity, also made headlines that reflected poorly on this popular tourist destination as well as the University¹⁰.

Local Authorities

Civic authorities should have acted firmly to prevent incidents such as those we have referred to above, in order to ensure that people from all communities are able to go about their business without antisemitic or other racist intimidation. Regrettably, however, the fact that several Local Authorities have passed motions supporting a boycott of Israeli goods (which they could not in fact implement as it would be unlawful), and to fly Palestinian flags “in solidarity with Gaza” has in fact sent exactly the opposite message, since “solidarity with Gaza” implies opposition to Israel’s right to defend itself against Hamas, an organisation that includes a call to murder all Jews anywhere in the world in its constitution.

We have also received reports about conflation of local Jewish people with the State of Israel in the context of Local Authority services. For example, a member of local authority staff who had posted vehemently anti-Israel comments in social media repeatedly expressed contempt for the religious needs of Jewish service users, and a public library refused to stock books of Jewish interest because of the nationality of the author.

While the UK Government has publicly stated that Councils south of the border were “*misjudging their remit*”¹¹ in purporting to ban Israeli-manufactured products and flying the Palestinian flag, and the UK Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has admonished them for such activities, saying that Councils “*should use their position of authority to actively reduce tensions, not stir them up*.”¹² and not “*have its own foreign policy and fly a Palestinian flag*”¹³, the Scottish Government and Parliament have remained silent about identical activities in Scotland, and, in doing so, have contributed to an atmosphere in which antisemitism has been enabled to flourish. Once again these incidents have attracted a great deal of attention, particularly in the United States, portraying Scotland as a country where the views of minorities are not respected, and leading to reports of a counter-boycott¹⁴.

¹⁰ Scottish Jewish event forced to move after threats
<http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Scottish-Jewish-event-forced-to-move-after-threats-311530>

¹¹ Government Action on Antisemitism (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390904/Government_Action_on_Antisemitism_final_24_Dec.pdf

¹² Report highlights great strides Britain has made in fighting antisemitism
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/report-highlights-great-strides-britain-has-made-in-fighting-antisemitism>

¹³ Speech to Board of Deputies of British Jews, 18 January 2015,
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/we-shall-tackle-anti-semitism>

¹⁴ Glasgow Flying Palestinian Flag Prompts Row
<http://news.sky.com/story/1315388/glasgow-flying-palestinian-flag-prompts-row>

US corporations boycott Glasgow over Gaza support
<http://rt.com/uk/181292-glasgow-palestine-us-boycott/>

Scottish Government, Parliament, and public bodies

Although the situation we have described is clearly not sanctioned by the Scottish Government, and the then First Minister issued a statement to the effect that “[the Scottish Government] will not tolerate any form of racial or religious prejudice, and that the full force of the law would be brought down on the perpetrators of any antisemitic incidents in Scotland.”¹⁵, the Scottish Government’s disproportionate comments have themselves contributed to the feelings of alienation that have been expressed by many Jewish people.

Participants in our *Being Jewish in Scotland* survey expressed considerable concern about disproportionate interest in Israel from bodies such as the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Human Rights Commission. There have, for example, been 54 parliamentary motions about Israel since the last Scottish Parliament election, the vast majority of them condemnatory. By comparison, during the same period there have been only 14 motions about Malawi (second highest and all complimentary), 13 about Iraq, and 12 each about Syria and South Africa. Similarly, there were 8 Scottish Government statements about Gaza in summer 2014, while by comparison, there have been just 4 Scottish Government statements about Syria since January 2013. There were 3 statements from the Scottish Human Rights Commission about the recent conflict in Gaza, bringing the number of statements condemning Israel to 6 out of only 7 statements that they have ever made about countries outwith the UK since the Commission was established.

The Scottish Government has issued more statements relating to Israel than to any other foreign country, including, on the same afternoon as the First Minister’s above statement, procurement advice that “strongly discourages trade with illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories”.¹⁶ No procurement advice has been issued relating to Cyprus, Tibet, Kashmir, or to any other occupied or disputed territory. In fact, the only country about which the Scottish Government has issued any procurement advice¹⁷ is Israel..

In addition, the Minister for Europe and International Development, inappropriately mentioned Gaza at a high profile Commonwealth Games Legacy event at Glasgow Central Mosque despite this evidently being contrary to Games protocol, and after an athlete had been reprimanded for making political gestures. The fact that senior speakers from other political parties followed suit does not exonerate him, but rather serves to give the impression that this partiality is not disputed by any political party, but is a given within Scottish politics, and this reinforces the damage to Scotland’s reputation as a country.

This disproportionate focus on a single country has been remarked upon by the media where it has been commented that “*ministers have used condemning Israel as a means of giving Scotland a separate foreign policy.*”¹⁸

¹⁵ “Zero tolerance of antisemitism” – but not quite yet
http://www.scojec.org/news/2014/14viii_antisemitism/antisemitism_2.html

¹⁶ Scottish Procurement Policy Note 4/2014
<http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Advice-against-trade-with-illegal-settlements-1040.aspx>

¹⁷ Scottish Procurement Policy Handbook
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/256155/0076031.pdf>
Scottish Procurement Policy Notes
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/Procurement/policy/SPPNSSPANS/policy-notes>

¹⁸ Parties diminish Palestine influence (Scotsman, 29 December 2014)
<http://www.scotsman.com/news/david-maddox-parties-diminish-palestine-influence-1-3646431>

Antisemitism does not consist only in personal abuse of individual Jews; it includes the application of different rules to Jewish people, institutions, and to the only Jewish country. When the Jewish state is uniquely singled out for criticism and boycott although acting no differently from other states, that is as much antisemitism as would be subjecting a Jewish restaurant to more intrusive health inspection than others. Just as ACPOS have noted with regard to hate crime, fear escalates dramatically in those who share the group identity of the victim of discrimination¹⁹. The particularity of the Scottish Government and Parliament therefore makes many in the Jewish community feel very vulnerable, whatever their views on the politics and conflicts of the Middle East.

Although the First Minister issued a statement condemning the terrorist attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris, it was not issued until a week after the event in response to a direct request, and has not received the same prominence on the Scottish Government website as that concerning the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices. This disparity of treatment, particularly when the murders in the supermarket were unambiguously a hate crime, has caused further disquiet in the Jewish community. That said, the Scottish Government's support for a wide variety of initiatives, and its commitment to "*the tartan of our national identity [which] has many colours and many strands*" enhances its international reputation.

Conclusion

Because the increasing diversity of the Scottish population means that other countries have a footprint in Scotland through people who originate from, or have family or other connections across the world, the Scottish Government's International Framework has implications not only for Scotland's relations and engagement abroad, but also for community relations in Scotland. We therefore urge the Scottish Government and its public sector partners to be aware of the unintended consequences that may arise out of their strategy and statements about foreign affairs, and to exercise the utmost responsibility, taking into account not only the content of statements, but also the language and tone in which these are presented, and the consistent application of the principles on which they are based,

¹⁹ "*Whilst all crime can increase the fear of being targeted in people other than the victim, fear of hate crime escalates dramatically in those who share with an immediate victim, the same group identity that has made a victim a target.*" (ACPOS Hate Crime Guidance Manual 2010)