

Message from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
for inclusion in the STUC St Andrew's Day Anti-Racism Brochure 2006

The reinvention of St Andrews Day as a public holiday celebrating Scottish identity has focussed attention once again on the diversity of the "Many Cultures" that contribute to our "One Scotland".

Identity matters. We see that almost every day on the front pages of our newspapers and the headlines on TV and radio. It matters locally when mosques or synagogues are fire-bombed, and when people wearing religious forms of dress are attacked in the street. It obviously matters nationally when government ministers find it necessary to make public and controversial pronouncements about such things. And it matters internationally when rogue states threaten to wipe others off the face of the earth for no other reason than their religion.

But just think: would the world not be a poorer place if everything were the same colour? What point would there be to music all played at one pitch? Would you bother eating if everything tasted the same? Or reading if every book told the same story?

Would society be better or worse if everyone had the same beliefs, desires and tastes? Of course not. Why do we go on foreign holidays if not to sample at least a little of the diversity of human experience? So why do some people object when some of that same diversity comes to live with us?

One of the striking things about the recent furore about religious clothing is its superficiality: what on earth do clothes matter? Would we really prefer anarchists in a suit and tie to responsible members of society in a veil?!

We all have many identities, and we use badges – literal and metaphorical – to express them. We have club ties, lapel pins, team colours, supposedly secret handshakes, and so on – and we use these to build a whole vast network of commonalities with others. Although these mark differences, difference in itself is not threatening; the threat arises only when extremists elevate one identity above all others and seek to eliminate the rest.

So let us use this new St Andrews Day to recognise all extremism for what it is, to embrace diversity – whether of appearance, clothing, belief, or diet, or whatever – and to understand that pattern is better than uniformity and that our diverse identities are the weave that holds the cloth of Scotland together.

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