

Public Affairs Officer's Report to the AGM 4th December 2005

Scottish Parliament and Executive

I continue to monitor activity in the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive on a daily basis and forward relevant information to Jewish Care, Cosgrove Care, Newark Care, Calderwood Lodge, Calderwood Jewish Education, the Board of Deputies, students and other interested bodies.

We have developed strong network of links with Ministers and with MSPs from all parties, so can respond quickly and effectively when the occasion demands.

Family Law

Intensive discussions with the Scottish Executive, Ministers and MSPs have led to an amendment relating to religious divorce (gittin) being accepted into the Family Law Bill. The Bill's Third (final) Stage has been provisionally timetabled for mid-December and we hope that this will be confirmed in the full Chamber of the Parliament. The amendment will allow Sheriff's to take notice when one party to a divorce refuses to give or accept a *get* and to delay the granting of a civil decree.

Charity Law

In our evidence on Charity Law to the Communities Committee we recommended that the promotion of religious or racial harmony and the promotion of equality and diversity should be included in the list of recognised charitable activities. This was picked up by the Committee and an amendment to this effect was introduced into the Bill.

Motions and Petitions

We have briefed communal organisations (such as the JNF) on relevant matters raised in motions and petitions and on the associated parliamentary procedures. We have also briefed MSPs on issues concerning the Jewish community, and, where appropriate, have put them in touch with other organisations, such as the Israel Information Office, who have been able to brief them on specific issues.

Chief Rabbi

During the Chief Rabbi's visit to the Scottish Parliament in September 2005, SCoJeC arranged meetings with the First and Deputy First Ministers, other key Ministers, the Presiding Officer and the leaders of all the main political parties. We also hosted a lunchtime meeting to which MSPs, religious leaders and key members of the Scottish Executive were invited.

Consultation Responses

A list of consultation responses submitted since the last AGM is attached. In preparing these responses we have consulted with relevant organisations and individuals including amongst others, Jewish Care, Norwood, Synagogue Chairmen, Rabbi Weiss, Rabbi Morris, health professionals, lawyers, the Board of Deputies, the Chief Rabbi's Office and Shechita-UK.

The SCoJeC website is shortly to be redesigned and it is intended that all consultation responses will be available online.

Media

I continue to monitor the Scottish Press on a daily basis and forward relevant information as appropriate.

MEMO (Minority Ethnic Matters Overview)

At the request of BEMIS (the Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure for Scotland) I now produce a weekly digest of information relevant to minority ethnic communities in Scotland. This includes relevant parliamentary activity in the Scottish and Westminster Parliaments, consultations, publications and press releases from the Scottish Executive and Whitehall Departments, and information about the activities of organisations such as the NHS, Commission for Racial Equality, Equal Opportunities Commission, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Civic Forum etc.

MEMO is circulated very widely via BEMIS' mailing list and is also posted on the BEMIS website. It will also be posted on the redesigned SCoJeC website.

Disclosure Scotland

To enable the community to meet the requirements of the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act, SCoJeC has become a Registered Body with the CRBS (Central Registered Body for Scotland) and is co-ordinating and submitting Disclosure Scotland applications for communal organisations. The current procedure is cumbersome, time-consuming and somewhat heavy-handed, and does not provide for the continual updating of Disclosure records. Questions have been asked in the Scottish Parliament, and the Minister has indicated that changes may be made to streamline the system and make it more effective. This may, however, take some considerable time, and it is important that all relevant people receive Disclosure Checks at the earliest opportunity.

Links with other organisations

SCoJeC has developed good links with a wide range of organisations including the Scottish Churches Committee and its Child Protection sub-group, the Voluntary Sector Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition, BEMIS, the Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group and a number of NHS Spiritual Care Policy Steering Groups.

Church of Scotland

Regular bilateral meetings have now been re-established between SCoJeC and the Church of Scotland and a positive relationship is being developed as demonstrated by the Church and Nation Committee's reliance on SCoJeC's written evidence in the C&N report to the General Assembly on antisemitism in Europe.

ScoJeC arranged a meeting between the Chief Rabbi and the Moderator during the Chief Rabbi's visit to the Scottish Parliament in September, and we have subsequently had two further meetings with the Moderator. As a result of our discussions the Moderator made some changes to the itinerary of his recent visit to Israel with the result that it was more evenly balanced than he had originally intended.

Roman Catholic Church

SCoJeC does not currently hold regular meetings with the Roman Catholic Church, though I do liaise regularly with their Parliamentary Officer, and more occasionally with their Child Protection Officer. However, the 40th anniversary of the Vatican document *Nostra Aetate* provided an opportunity to develop links between the two communities. The Cardinal welcomed SCoJeC's suggestion that this anniversary should be commemorated, and hosted a reception at his residence during which he and Rabbi Rubin of Giffnock Synagogue planted a tree in his garden. SCoJeC intends to reciprocate by planting a tree in the Cardinal's name in Israel.

STUC

Three or four bilateral meetings take place each year to discuss matters of mutual interest. Relations are cordial, and have resulted in invitations to attend Congress and Womens' Conference; in a public meeting at Giffnock Synagogue at which the speakers were representatives of the Histadrut and the Palestine General Federation of Trades Unions who were attending Congress; and in the invitation to write a piece for inclusion in the STUC St Andrew's Day Anti-Racism brochure.

Four Corners

Four Corners continues to receive a very favourable reception, particularly from people living in the smaller Jewish communities or outwith any Jewish community. The 8th quarterly issue will be out at Chanukah.

Questionnaire

The two most recent issues of Four Corners included a questionnaire asking about people's experience of being Jewish in Scotland, whether they had experienced any antisemitism, what were their needs, and whether they would like more active involvement with SCoJeC. Responses are currently being collated and a report will be produced.

Other Activities

Chol HaMoed Succot party in Oban and pre-Rosh Hashanah event in Dundee

SCoJeC facilitated these events which provided an opportunity for people in the smaller Scottish communities to get together to socialise and think about Yom Tov. We hope to hold a Chanukah party this year in Lochgilphead, but plans still have to be finalised.

Public Resource

S-CoJeC receives a large number of enquiries which range from the time of Shabbat in Edinburgh, to the Jewish view of capital punishment; from where to find a shul in Gairloch to the number of shuls in Ayr; from the origin of the name Maclsaac to the Jewish theological view of extra-terrestrial life, and I try to answer these as helpfully as possible.

And finally.....

I would like to thank the Management Team for their ongoing support during the past year, and, in particular to thank Ephraim Borowski who generously shares his vast expertise and always responds to e-mails even when on holiday!

Leah Granat
December 2005

Consultation responses submitted by SCoJeC since the AGM 26/11/2004

September 2004

Paying for Water Services (Scottish Executive)

October 2004

Independent Review of Marches and Parades in Scotland (Scottish Executive)

Race Equality Review (Scottish Executive)

November 2004

Admissibility of Petitions (Public Petitions Committee, Scottish Parliament)

January 2005

Charities and Trustee Investment Bill (Communities Committee, Scottish Parliament)

Draft Equality Policy (Communities Scotland)

February 2005

Family Law Bill (Justice 1 Committee, Scottish Parliament)

Admissibility of Petitions (Procedures Committee, Scottish Parliament)

March 2005

Strategic Plan (Commission for Racial Equality)

April 2005

Dying with Dignity: Assisted Dying (Jeremy Purvis MSP)

May 2005

Family Law Bill (Justice 1 Committee, Scottish Parliament)

July 2005

Census Consultation (Office of National Statistics)

August 2005

Beef labeling Policy (Scottish Executive)

Cell-Sharing on the First Night in Custody (Scottish Prison Service)

Review of Census Ethnicity Classifications (Scottish Executive)

2011 Census Consultation (General Register Office for Scotland)

Human Tissue Bill (Health Committee, Scottish Parliament)

Scottish Social Attitudes Family Module (Scottish Executive)

September 2005

Protecting Vulnerable Adults (Scottish Executive)

October 2005

Safe and Secure Homes for our Most Vulnerable Children: Adoption and Fostering
(Scottish Executive)

Citizens for Europe Funding Programme (European Union)

Human Tissue Bill and Issues relating to Adults with Incapacity (Scottish Executive)

Race Equality Scheme (Strathclyde Police)

November 2005

Census Ethnicity Classification Draft Proposals (Scottish Executive)

2011 Census Consultation (General Register Office for Scotland)

Preventing Extremism Together: Places of Worship (Home Office)

Race Equality Scheme (2) (Strathclyde Police)

Scottish Commissioner for Human Rights (Justice 1 Committee, Scottish Parliament)

Still to be submitted in 2005

Possession of Extreme Pornographic Material (Scottish Executive)

Forced Marriage, A Wrong not a Right (Scottish Executive)

Charity References in Documents (Scottish Executive)

Ethnic Minority Women at Work (Equal Opportunities Commission)

All-party inquiry into antisemitism in the UK (UK Parliament all-party group against antisemitism)

Equalities Review

What in the World (International Association for Community Development)

Establishing an Accurate Register of Charities in Scotland (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator)

Meeting the Charity Test (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator)

Consents and Notifications (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator)

Meetings, Briefings, Conferences etc attended

Regular/on-going meetings

Church of Scotland
STUC
Churches Parliamentary Officer meetings
Policy Officers Network
Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office briefings
Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition
Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group
Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group
Communities Scotland Minority Ethnic Communities Steering Group
Lanarkshire NHS Spiritual Care Policy Steering Group
Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Reference Group
Edinburgh International Centre for World Spiritualities

Occasional and one-off meetings

Scottish Council for Minorities Conference (as speaker)
Scottish Carers Conference (as speaker)
Church of Scotland General Assembly
Moderator Church of Scotland
Nostra Aetate 40th Anniversary event
STUC Black Workers Committee Hustings
STUC Womens' Conference
Scottish Parliament/EICWS Young People's Debate on Peace Education
SCVO Seminar From Rhetoric to Reality
POWER Inquiry
Scottish Executive/BEMIS Race Equality Review
Hansard Society Democracy Forum
Scottish Interfaith Council AGM
Glasgow Anti-Racist Alliance conference 'Researching the Research'
Faith Communities and Local Government in Glasgow Focus Group
Forum on Discrimination
BEMIS/1990 Trust consultation on Community Leadership
Ethnic Minority Grant Scheme Grant-holders' Workshop
Scottish Executive National Standards for Community Engagement
Civil society Index Seminar
Commission for Equalities and Human Rights Conference
Young Scot
Edinburgh Interfaith Association Annual Conference
Governing Scotland Conference
Scottish Consumer Council re Ethnic Minority Consumers Research
PAiH/Communities Scotland Race Equality consultation
Europe Day in Scotland (Scottish Parliament)
CRE Funding and Legal Strategy Seminar
Lloyds TSB pre- grant application meeting
EOC Ethnic Minority Focus Group
A Question of Identity Conference
Scottish Interfaith Association Reception, Scottish Parliament