

Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Building Bridges with Israel

Wednesday 18th January 2017

1) Jackson Carlaw MSP (JC) opened the meeting, welcoming all attendees and presenters to the inaugural meeting of the Cross-Party Group. He thanked the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation and Mark's Deli for providing cakes for the meeting.

2) "Women and Their Olive Trees: A Model for Co-Existence:"

- JC welcomed representatives from WIZO – Lorraine Warren (President of WIZOUK) (LW), and Maureen Fisher who brought with them the "Women and Their Olive Trees: A Model for Co-Existence" exhibition.
- WIZO was founded in 1918 in the UK and consists of 50 organizations, with 250,000 women members providing around 800 programs.
- This project was founded 4 years ago and involves Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women coming together to work on art projects. They looked for a symbol that can unite them and decided upon the olive tree as a shared icon and representation of peace and reconciliation.
- The women have produced 36 paintings, which form the touring exhibition. The tour has already visited the United Nations and European Parliament. This is its first British stop.
- WIZO focuses on changing lives and building bridges. It runs projects throughout Israel, including one which provides "last chance" schooling for troubled young people in Jerusalem. There are many examples of success from this school. Another example of WIZO's work is the Jewish-Arab Women's choir which tours Israel. Lorraine thanked the CPG for hosting the exhibition, and invited questions.
- JC asked what reactions the paintings have elicited thus far. LW expressed her amazement at the success of the project. She noted that the project's goal of bringing people together has bore fruit around the world.
- Stanley Lovatt asked whether there are any plans to sell prints of the paintings. LW said that although this was not the intention behind the project, it could happen with permission from the artists.
- Evy Yedd thanked WIZO for bringing the exquisite pictures to the Scottish Parliament. She asked if people were surprised by how integrated Arabs and Muslims are into Israeli society? LW stated her belief that people do not realize this and hopes that the project can improve understanding of the region amongst the general public.
- JC asked what the artists are doing during the tour. LW answered that the artists continue to paint and spend time with each other.
- JC thanked WIZO for bringing the paintings to the Scottish Parliament and hoped that they will be able to bring them for a fuller exhibition in the future.

3) The Jewish Cultural Contribution to Scotland

- JC noted that he had visited the Scottish Jewish Archive Centre (SJA) in Garnethill in December and was struck by the quality and breadth of the centre. He also saw parallels with the Muslim community, who are now seeking to archive their

experiences in Scotland. He welcomed Diana Wolfson (DW) from the Archives to discuss the Jewish community's cultural impact on Scotland.

- DW began by saying that there have been Jews in Scotland since the 1600s, but the first congregations weren't formed until the 19th century. Garnethill synagogue was opened in 1879 and is now category A listed building and home to the SJA. DW described a broad range of artists of Jewish extraction who have studied, lived and worked in Scotland, including the renowned portrait artist Joseph Ansell, the sculptor Benno Schotz, the painter of Glasgow scenes who fled the Nazis Hilda Goldwag, the concentration camp survivor and painter Marianne Grant, and portrait artist Lynne Wolfson.
- DW moved on to other contributors, including the architect Isy Metzstein, the chronicler of Jewish life in the Gorbals Evelyn Cowan, the writer Ernest Levy, Henry Diamond who brought the Dead Sea Scrolls to Scotland, and the singers and songwriters who have formed part of Scotland's dance halls, choirs and music scene.
- More information can be found in "The Jewish Experience in Scotland: From Immigration to Integration", a recently published book.
- JC thanked DW for her contribution. JC asked how the SJA evaluates and processes the many deposits to the archives. DW said that the process is thorough and that everything is assessed as to whether it will contribute to the SJA's ongoing projects, which currently include a history of Calderwood Lodge school and the Holocaust Study Centre, which is being developed at the moment.
- Martin Beck asked what is being done to chronicle what is happening with the contemporary Jewish community. DW said that the SJA has an ongoing oral history project and an open door policy on new information.
- Evy Yedd praised the SJA on the breadth and depth of their records and knowledge.

4) Any Other Competent Business

- It was noted that two school pupils who recently visited Auschwitz-Birkenau will give the Time For Reflection address on Holocaust Memorial Day.
- DW noted the quality of care given to her daughter in Israel by a multicultural hospital staff.
- Ruth Kennedy made clear that she felt inspired by the work of WIZO and asked what work the CPG can do to promote co-existence and to build bridges with Israel.
- Ephraim Borowski noted the recent work on Jewish life in Scotland, "What's Changed About Being Jewish in Scotland", in particular the feelings of isolation and loss of connection with Scottishness that many Jews felt in Scotland. The evidence from Scotland's Jews is that some attitudes towards Israel have contributed to this isolation and disconnection and, at times, have spilled over into anti-Semitism.
- Itamar Nitzan asked about the Scottish Government's position on anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. JC has asked the Scottish Government if they intend on adopting the same definition of anti-Semitism that the UK Government has. JC and others noted their intention push the Scottish Government on this.
- Rabbi Rose expressed his concern that Israel's humanitarian work in Syria – in particular, providing medical care – is not widely known. JC stated that he has tabled

a motion on this topic, and noted that in building bridges with Israel, the CPG will be able to increase visibility of the good work that Israel does.

- Nigel Goodridge stated that he is working to bring the Shalom Festival back at the 2017 Edinburgh Festival. JC made clear his and other MSPs' support for its return.
- Ross Thomson MSP asked what support the CPG can give to countering the unfair and untrue BDS narrative. JC hoped that the work of the CPG can assist in this.
- Danielle Bett asked about the relationship between the CPG and anti-Semitism. JC and Sammy Stein discussed the connection between some criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism.

5) JC thanked everyone for their attendance and brought the meeting to a close.

Apologies:

Gordon Matheson

Attendees:

Jackson Carlaw MSP

Adam Tomkins MSP

Bernard Hughes – Director of External Affairs, Jewish Leadership Council

Bill Bowman MSP

Carol Levstein – Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation

Christina Jones – Glasgow Friends of Israel

Christine Muir – Glasgow Friends of Israel

Daniel Boyd – COFIS

Danielle Bett – ScoJec

Diana Wolfson Scottish Jewish Archives Centre

Dorothy Kaufmann – Chair, Edinburgh Friends of Israel

Ephraim Borowski – ScoJec

Evelyn Yedd – Co-President, Glasgow Jewish Representative Council

Guy Walker – COFIS

Hilary Rifkind – Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation/ScoJec

Itamar Nitzan

Jackie Cowan – Bridges for Peace

Jean Brannigan – Chair, Council of Christians and Jews

Jeff Tippner – St Fergus/Peterhead Friends of Israel

John Mason MSP

Liz Gibb – Parliamentary Prayer Scotland

Margaret Johnson – COFIS

Martin Beck – Chair, Aberdeen Friends of Israel

Mary Divine – Edinburgh Friends of Israel

Michael Kusznir – Office of Jackson Carlaw MSP

Micheline Brannan – Chair, SCoJec

Nathan Wilson – Office of Jackson Carlaw MSP

Nicola Montgomery – Dundee Friends of Israel

Nigel Goodrich – COFIS

Peter Speirs – Scotland Director, Jewish Leadership Council

Philip Aitchison – CFI

Rabbi David Rose – Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation

Ross Thomson MSP

Ruth Kennedy – Centre for Scotland/Israel Relations

Sammy Stein – Glasgow Friends of Israel

Sheena Anderson – Edinburgh Friends of Israel

Stanley Grossman – Scottish Friends of Israel

Vicci Stein – Glasgow Friends of Israel