

Cross-Party Group on Building Bridges with Israel

Date and Time Wednesday 13 September 2023 at 6pm.

Minute

Present

MSPs

Jackson Carlaw MSP (Con)
Fergus Ewing MSP (SNP)
Jamie Greene MSP (Con)
Alexander Stewart MSP (Con)
Sandesh Gulhane MSP (Con)
Jeremy Balfour MSP (Con)

Invited guests

Oren Marmorstein, Deputy Israeli Ambassador to the UK
Hodaya Avzada, Head of Domestic and Civil Society Affairs Department

Non-MSP Group Members

Sammy Stein
Vicci Stein
Edward Green
Stuart Roy McIvor
David Nallaratham
Sydney Switzer
Edward Sutherland
Gordon Beaton
Susan Siegel
Stanley Lovatt
Donald Boyd
Julia Mitchell
Jean Brannigan
Gina Brown
Liz Gibb
Steve Haire
Douglas Flett
Mike Parker
Nathan Wilson

Apologies

Murdo Fraser MSP
John Mason MSP
Walter Hecht
Stanley Grossman
Ephraim Borowski
Joe Goldblatt

Convenor Welcome

Jackson welcomes members to the CPG event noting that this is the first in-person event since before the coronavirus pandemic. Jackson introduces CPG guests, Oren Marmorstein, Israel's Deputy Ambassador to the UK to speak to the group

Oren Marmorstein Presentation

Oren greets the guests of the CPG and says how he has enjoyed his visit to Scotland. Oren gives his background as a diplomat and his roles prior to becoming Israel's Deputy Ambassador to the UK.

Oren presents on the geopolitical shift that has occurred in Israel. This is due to Israel's progress in establishing diplomatic relations with Bahrain, the UAE and Morocco. Israel have secured a trade agreement with the UAE and are using Israel's desalination resources to provide Jordan with desalinated water to fight drought and climate change. This shows that Israel are using this political change to attempt to address global issues such as climate change. There is still more to be done for Israel and they are looking to have a full diplomatic relationship with Saudi Arabia.

However, Oren stated that not all countries are celebrating the peace that Israel is making with its neighbours in the Middle East, and that there is a threat from Iran. Iran's threat stems from their close relationship with Russia and their stocks of enriched uranium which is alarming for Israel. Oren states that Iran is also providing money, training and arms for terrorist attacks in Israel.

There are currently serious challenges within Israel, namely the judicial reform. This has led to widespread debate and discussions in Israel, as well as mass protests. Oren hopes that Israel will weather the storm and finish the episode more united and with more strength.

Oren presented on the opportunities that exist between Israel and Scotland, stating that there can be concrete work on issues that will benefit both countries. For example,

there have been huge deals recently between Israeli and Scottish companies with regards to energy and eco technology and remain more opportunities to expand this and to cooperate.

Scotland and Israel can also cooperate on health; Israel has been innovating and creating technologies within their own health system. Israel would be keen to bring their technology and know-how to Scotland and are trying to think of ways to use technology to beat backlogs in appointments. There is currently a pilot project in the UK in which Israel is providing health technology in Northern England and Oren hopes that this could be scaled up and perhaps expanded into Scotland.

Israel is in a time of exciting opportunities but there are also risks and dangers which Israel must be aware of.

Oren Marmorstein Q&A Session

Jamie Greene MSP: asked whether the domestic political issues within Israel are providing to be a challenge for unity within the country and whether these are providing opportunities for those who wish to cause Israel harm

Oren Marmorstein: there are potential issues with some workers stating that they could strike, however, knows that Israel will unite to keep their home safe and that Israel must solve these issues and be more united.

CPG Member: asked about the current social situation in Israel

Oren Marmorstein: Oren agrees tha this is a difficult time in Israel but there is a need for cohesion

Jason Leitch: states that there is an existing relationship between Scotland and Israel from which both countries benefit; Jason had productive conversations about this and would be interested in pursuing these mutual aims.

Toast to Rosh Hashanah

Oren led a toast to Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

Time to mingle

Convenor Close

Jackson closed the meeting, thanking Oren for his excellent presentation; thanked members for attending the in-person meeting.

Next meeting: Wednesday 15th November (online)