

Cross-Party Group on Building Bridges with Israel – AGM & Meeting

15/11/2023 – 6 pm (via Zoom)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Jackson Carlaw MSP

John Mason MSP

Murdo Fraser MSP

Paul O’Kane MSP

Stephen Kerr MSP

Sandesh Gulhane MSP

Invited guests

Oren Marmorstein, Deputy Israeli Ambassador of Israel

Hodaya Avzada, Head of Domestic and Civil Society Affairs, Israeli Embassy

Rabbi Moshe Rubin, Giffnock & Newton Mearns Shul and Senior Rabbi of Scotland

Non-MSP Group Members

Andrew Jones

Bernard Farkin

Bill Bowman

Christina Jones

David Nallarathnam

Debby Taylor

Dorothe Kaufmann

Elad Katz

Elizabeth Buchanan

Ephraim Borowski

Evy Yedd

Jean Brannigan

Mark Sutherland

Micheline Brannan

Myer Green

Shaun Cauvin

Stanley Grossman
Stanley Lovatt
Stuart McIvor
Susan Siegel
Vicci Stein
Sammy Stein
Walter Hecht
Helen Stewart
Jess Maclennan
Susan Church
Nathan Wilson
Craig Wilson
Susan Verschueren

Apologies

Fergus Ewing MSP
Jackie Baillie MSP
Katy Clark MSP
Douglas Flett
Joe Goldblatt

Chair Welcome

Jackson Carlaw MSP, Chair, opened the meeting by welcoming all members, leading the CPG from the Israeli Embassy in London. He shared that it is his first visit to the Israeli Embassy, specifically as a statement of support for Israel. He introduced the guest speaker, Oren Marmorstein, Deputy Israeli Ambassador.

Jackson invited Rabbi Rubin to begin the meeting with prayer and reflection following the outrage of the attack on Israel on 7th October 2023 and to pay tribute to the victims. Jackson introduced Rabbi Moshe Rubin.

Prayer and Reflection

Rabbi Moshe Rubin, of Giffnock Newton Mearns Shul and Senior Rabbi of Scotland, thanked the Chair for the honour of being invited to address the Group.

He shared his recent experience of strong friendships and respect within interfaith communities in Scotland; having addressed the Church of Scotland General Assembly in May and having attended the Glasgow Civic Reception for Interfaith Week at the City Chambers the previous evening, in the presence of HRH Princess Anne, and chatting with Shaykh Hassan Rabbani on various topics.

Rabbi Rubin then led with prayer.

Chair thanked Rabbi Rubin for his contribution and expressed his appreciation for his Leadership throughout the Eastwood and East Renfrewshire community.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM elected the office bearers of the CPG for this session:

Convener: Jackson Carlaw MSP

- Proposer: John Mason MSP, seconded by Paul O’Kane MSP

Deputy Convener: Fergus Ewing MSP

- Proposer: Jackson Carlaw MSP, seconded by Stephen Kerr MSP

Honorary Secretary: Stanley Lovatt

- Proposer: Jackson Carlaw MSP, seconded by John Mason MSP

Minutes Approved

Minutes from 09/05/2023; proposed by Stanley Lovatt, seconded by Paul O’Kane MSP

Minutes from 13/09/2023; proposed by Jackson Carlaw MSP, seconded by Stanley Lovatt

Presentation and Discussion: Present Situation in the Middle East

Chair welcomed Oren Marmorstein and Hodaya Avzada to the meeting. He acknowledged the debate that took place earlier today at Westminster and the intention to do the same in the Scottish Parliament next week regarding the Israel-Hamas War.

Chair paid tribute to parliamentary colleagues present at the memorial service at Giffnock Newton Mearns Shul. Chair invited Oren to speak of the current difficult situation which will not be resolved quickly.

Oren Marmorstein:

Oren stated that this is Israel’s darkest hour and that nothing like the horrific attack on 7th October 2023 has ever been experienced.

Israel has screened the full 43 minutes of what Hamas did on 7th October in Westminster; as the Israeli Embassy believe it is their duty to the victims and families to show this raw material, in the knowledge that there are deniers of the atrocities that were carried out on October 7th.

Oren Marmorstein introduced and played a short, censored video of the October 7th attack.

Oren stated that the atrocities of 7th October are very different to the attacks of the past; not since the Holocaust have as many Jews died in one day; the terrorists went with cameras and took pride in their crimes, committing unspeakable violence in their massacre.

Many people look at this in the paradigm of the Israeli-Palestine conflict, however, it should be looked at differently as this is not a war about land but is a war against humanity; Hamas have waged this war against humanity and have said that they would repeat it again and again to eradicate Israel.

Oren stated that the World did not call for a ceasefire after 9/11 or Pearl Harbour for the US, and the UK Government would equally retaliate were such an attack to occur against the UK; this is rightly so because it is the duty of every government to provide security for its citizens. Ceasefire calls would give Hamas a gift as would provide an opportunity to rearm and regroup to carry out further attacks.

Oren emphasised that this war is of a different magnitude, a new chapter, and is a fight between civilisation and a group with no connection to civilisation. Hamas is clear about what they want to do to Israeli families. Israelis are holding their families close following the attack in which atrocities happened in Israeli living rooms.

Oren retold the harrowing story of 2 hostages, who are young children taken from the Kibbutz whilst their mother was away. She phoned them to reassure them during the attack and noticed the children start to whisper. She heard Arabic within her home and her 12 year old son begging not to be taken by Hamas, "Don't take me, I am too young". However, her 2 children were taken. Babies and old people were taken and there were many acts of sexual violence committed. These atrocities show clearly what the terrorists are committed to doing against every Jew.

Israel is therefore very clear on the crimes the terrorists are committed to enacting against every Jew. However, the World should know what Hamas is doing to its own people in Gaza.

Oren introduced a short video of Al Quds hospital in Gaza, from which Hamas terrorists shot an RPG from the entrance towards Israel. Also grenades, explosives, weapons and ammunition were found in the cellar of a childrens' hospital in Gaza.

Oren stated that there are very hard pictures coming from inside Gaza, of many babies taken outside of a hospital as a result of there being no fuel for incubators, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health. Israeli soldiers risked their lives being sent into the hospital with fuel supplies for the incubators. However, Hamas did not allow the fuel containers into the hospital to be used. This morning Israeli soldiers tried to take both new incubators and fuel into the hospital.

On the ground operation, Oren stated that women and children were sent out by Hamas terrorists to shield them. Oren emphasised that this is an enemy much worse than ISIS, because Hamas do not care about Gaza civilians and they want them to get hurt; in order to try and create the biggest crisis ever.

It is clear that Hamas using hospitals and ambulances for terrorist purposes is immoral; and the question is whether the West are to make this ploy effective by stating that Israel cannot shoot at these facilities and it must not be tolerated; thus rendering immunity to Hamas. It shows that Hamas can hide behind civilians. The reason they are throwing civilians in front of them is because they want as many casualties as possible, as they are then sure that the West will stop Israel. However, Israel cannot stop as, if Israel stops, then the attacks of 7th October will be repeated.

Oren closed by saying that this is truly a fight against evil. Israel has one request – give us time - time to ensure that these atrocities never happen again. There was a pledge of ‘never again’ after the Holocaust and we must be truthful to this and ensure that it never does happen again.

Jackson Carlaw MSP:

Jackson thanked Oren for his emotional, candid and difficult presentation, empathising with the situation and welcoming questions from the CPG members.

Questions

Jackson Carlaw MSP: What was the reaction from Parliamentarians to the videos shown at Westminster?

- Could not believe the atrocities and were shocked, tearful and traumatised; emphasised that the truth must be put out there.

John Mason MSP: What is the longer-term plan? If Hamas people are wiped out, will Iran move others in?

- There are many questions. However, 2 things are clear. Given the lesson of 7th October, the Israeli Prime Minister will make sure that security is observed, supervised and guarded by Israel itself as Israel cannot allow for security to not be maintained. The Israeli Defence Minister has said that he does not know what will be there, but what won't be present in

Gaza is Hamas. The objective is to dismantle Hamas' military and governmental capabilities. Secondly, Israel will not be present in Gaza after the war as Israel has no intention to resettle there.

- The number one concern is to neutralise the threat.

Q: What can Israelis do in Scotland to promote understanding of the traumatic events that happened in Israel and what can be done to explain to Jewish people what is happening in Scotland. Furthermore, there is high antisemitism in Scotland and there are questions to be asked of the action from the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government.

- There are high emotions and anxieties in Scotland. Rabbi Rubin spoke of great support from interfaith communities and all faiths.
- The First Minister grew up in the very large Jewish community in Eastwood and his words at the memorial service were extremely profound, genuine and sincere. However, there is complete understanding as to the concerns that are being voiced.
- It is the duty of all politicians to educate, as is being done by Vision Schools Scotland, which provides a sustained programme of education.
- The First Minister is open to be contacted and has asked what he can do to help.
- The concerns of Jews in Scotland must be raised as Jews must feel safe. The Israeli Embassy has raised this issue at Scottish and UK level in Government and is grateful for the support received. The UK is the most friendly country in Europe, alongside the USA, yet Jews feel unsafe. It must be noted that foreign policy is determined by the Foreign Office in London, not in Holyrood.
- The physical security of Jews in Scotland must be addressed.

Q: Every day there are pictures of Gaza yet the Israeli attack appears to be censored?

- Video clips and footage can be shared.

Sandesh Gulhane MSP: Can evidence be shown of the Hamas bases and using civilians?

- Intelligence and information suggest in the clearest way that Hamas is operating beneath hospitals and within kindergartens. The main HQ of Hamas lies underneath the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza.
- The long video cannot be shared as the attack is so exposed and the privacy of the victims' families must be honoured. Video clips can be shared, and we can also say the truth.

AOB

Chair advised that he is hoping that Jeremy Balfour MSP will address a future meeting as he leads the CPG on Funerals and Bereavement.

Close by Chair

Chair thanked members for attending and for their contributions. He expressed his sincerest gratitude to Oren and Hodaya.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th March 2024