

**Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Building Bridges with Israel
Meeting of the 21st June 2017**

Sederunt

Jackson Carlaw	MSP
Peter Speirs	Scotland Director, Jewish Leadership Council
Stanley Lovatt	Honorary Consul of Israel in Scotland
Stanley Grossman	Scottish Friends of Israel
Nathan Wilson	Office of Jackson Carlaw MSP
Michael Kusznir	Office of Jackson Carlaw MSP
Leon Thompson	Visit Scotland
Atilla Incecik	University of Strathclyde
Rabbi David Rose	Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation
Nigel Goodrich	Confederation of Friends of Israel, Scotland
Daniel McCroskrie	Office of Donald Cameron MSP
John Mason	MSP
Jamie Greene	MSP
Richard Lyle	MSP
Nick Naddell	Burness Paull
Linor Kirkpatrick	Israelis in Scotland
Danielle Bett	ScoJeC/Israelis in Scotland
Itamar Nitzan	Personal capacity
Evy Yedd	Glasgow Jewish Representative Council
Christina Jones	Glasgow Friends of Israel
Liz Cabb	PPS Edinburgh
Douglas Flett	International Christian Chamber of Commerce
Micheline Brannan	ScoJeC
Bill Bowman	MSP
Rachael Hamilton	MSP
Myer Green	Scottish Friends of Israel
Sammy Stein	Glasgow Friends of Israel
Alistair Barton	Director, Pray for Scotland
Kush Boparai	Israel Embassy
Nathan Tsrer	Head of Economic and Trade Ministry, Israeli Embassy
Ruth Kennedy	Centre for Scotland and Israel Relations

- Jackson Carlaw (JC) welcomed all attendees, particularly the MSPs
- JC put forward the minutes of the previous meeting – these were proposed by Bill Bowman (BB) MSP and seconded by Evylin Yedd.
- Ruth Kennedy (RK) brought to the Group's attention that the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) will be in Aberdeen in the coming months and are hoping to exhibit their work publicly in the Scottish Parliament

- Nigel Goodrich (NG) circulated flyers for the upcoming Shalom Festival, and thanked Edinburgh City Council for providing a venue for the event on August 8, 9, and 10. He also noted that WIZO will be displaying their work at the festival.
 - JC praised the mini-Shalom Festival which took place in his Eastwood constituency to commemorate Yom Ha'atzmaut as well as the well-attended event with the Israeli Ambassador at Giffnock Shul.

Nathan Tsrer

- JC welcomed Nathan Tsrer (NT) from the Israeli Trade Mission to the United Kingdom to discuss the Israeli economic situation. JC noted that NT had visited Scotland for his honeymoon, and welcomed the Ambassador's intention to holiday in Scotland in the future.
- NT thanked the Group for inviting him to attend the meeting. He is proud of the Israeli relationship with the UK and Scotland in particular, and is keen to continue to build bridges between our two countries.
- NT noted that the UK and Israel produce £5.7 billion worth of trade each year, and that for over 70 years Israel has been a beacon of economic innovation for the world. There are more Israeli companies listed on the London Stock Exchange than in any exchange outside Israel (29), and the country's recent hugely successful bond sale was oversubscribed 4 times over in Europe. Israel's population is young, with an average age under 30, and educated, with the largest proportion of 21-30 year olds enrolled at universities in the world. Israel also has the highest concentration of engineers on the planet.
- NT explained that Israel has in excess of 1000 start-ups each year, many of which operate in Scotland and the rest of the UK. Several multibillion dollar deals have recently been completed involving Israeli companies, including sales to Intel and Google. There are over 300 multinational research and development centres in Israel, including many from UK-based companies. This underscores that Israel has developed from a land of oranges to a land of Apples.
- Finally, NT clarified that while Israel's economy is around 1 tenth the size of the UK's, but punches well above its weight worldwide. The country will continue to build economic bridges around the world to ensure that the economy goes to strength to strength, and the Israeli trade mission to the UK will form a central plank of that.
- JC thanked NT for his presentation. JC asked what action Israeli governments had taken to bring about its economic success.
 - NT explained that after economic difficulties in the 1980s, Israel chose to embrace the technological revolution of the 1990s through free trade and the use of tax incentives. The focus was placed on fostering high quality jobs in future-facing industries, and on encouraging entrepreneurship. An important scheme is one in which the Israeli government takes 50% of the risk of young entrepreneurs' start-ups.

- Jamie Greene MSP (JG) described his trip to Israel in 2016 and asked if many of the start-ups are connected to Israeli military service, and asks how we can turn our somewhat risk averse society into one that embraces entrepreneurial risk.
 - NT said that he did not believe that most Israeli start-ups are related to military service. He described the budget of c.£200 million per annum spent on start-ups as a modest investment in the future, which has benefited the Israeli economy significantly.

- Rachael Hamilton MSP (RH) also visited Israel last year and asked whether the Israeli government is in talks with the UK government concerning future trade agreements in a post-Brexit UK.
 - NT explained that the Israeli government is looking forward to working closely with the UK government in the future in trade and other economic partnerships.
 - JC noted that this is a fascinating developing opportunity, and one with which this CPG will be delighted to assist.

- Itimar Nitzan (IN) wanted to note that Israeli culture is a function of Israeli society, and that therefore Israel has many more mature students than in the UK, something which alters the culture of Israeli universities and the behaviour of their graduates, who tend to be more purposeful in their career plans than their equivalents in other countries.

- Nick Waddell (NW) noted that Scotland's oil and gas sector is advanced. Israel has not invested much in this sector; how can this be changed?
 - NT welcomed NW's views and is very keen to connect anyone from the industry or the broader sector in Scotland with their counterparts in Israel, particularly a significant findings of oil and gas have been made in Israel.
 - NW thanked NT for this and looked forward to taking him up on this offer.

- BB asked whether, like Israel, Scotland should have its own stock exchange.
 - NT explained that, whilst it is important for generating venture capital in Israel, that crowdfunding is even more significant.
- JC asked whether any other countries had attempted to replicate Israel's economic successes and challenge the country?
 - NT made clear that Israel seeks to collaborate, not compete with others, and is always keen to work with other countries to their mutual benefit.

- Douglas Flett expressed his belief that it is essential that business people and politicians go to Israel to see the economic success for themselves. Whilst Israel is better at taking risks, Scotland is better at communications and other aspects of business, therefore, we should work together.

- Sammy Stein said that a couple of years ago he had spoken informally with a senior Scottish Government figure seeking increased work with Israel. Has anything come of this?

- NT unambiguously stated that Israel is open 365 days a year for collaboration with Scotland and the broader UK. He is happy to facilitate any meetings and connections he can between the two countries.
- JC thanked NT for his time and his presentation.

Visit Scotland

- JC expressed his pleasure that Leon Thompson (LT) of Visit Scotland had been able to attend the Group to discuss opportunities for increased tourism between Israel and Scotland.
- LT thanked the Group for the invitation. He started by outlining the Scottish tourism sector. There are around 15 million visitors to Scotland each year, providing around £9 billion to the Scottish economy and supporting in excess of 200,000 jobs. Around 100 new airline routes have been developed in the past 6 years, and the sector is demonstrating strong growth.
- LT explained that Visit Scotland aims to market Scotland as a hub of inclusive and sustainable tourism, with world class events. Around 85% of visitors to Scotland are from the rest of the UK, with the USA, France, Australia, and Germany the other key markets.
- Visit Britain's information on Israeli tourism to the UK shows that around 200,000 Israelis visited the UK in 2016. Whilst there is limited Scotland-specific information, LT estimated that around 7,200 Israelis visited Scotland in 2016, spending more on average whilst on their visit. Most came here on holiday, but a significant minority visited on business. Most came during the Summer.
- Looking forward, connectivity is key to growth. Whilst direct flights are ideal, it is important to think of connectivity more broadly and recognise that there are many other ways of boosting tourism than direct flights alone.
- JC thanked LT for his presentation. JC asked whether Visit Scotland focused on new markets or maximising the numbers of visitors from currently strong markets.
 - LT said that Visit Scotland focuses on return on investment. The insights team monitors statistics and trends closely and makes decisions on resources based on that. Investment is balanced between new and existing markets. On direct flights, a critical mass of interest is needed to encourage airlines to take them up. This is difficult to do, and Scotland does not even have direct flights to China.
- Stanley Lovatt (SL) commended LT on his presentation and expressed his belief that there are significantly more than 7200 Israeli visitors to Scotland each year. He noted that he will shortly meet with El Al to discuss possible opportunities, and invited LT to attend with him.

- LT said that he would be delighted to attend, if he is able, and emphasised that those particular statistics were estimates.
- Rabbi David Rose explained that he looks after a lot of tourists in Edinburgh in his position, and said that he believed that Kosher tourism is a potential growth area that Scotland should look at.
- IN explained that there is far less annual leave in Israel than in the UK, and agreed that Kosher tourism would be a huge boost to the number of Israelis who could visit Scotland.
- Evy Yedd said that many people in Israel are unaware of what Scotland has to offer, particularly in terms of shopping and other leisure activities.
- Sammy Stein said that at his Glasgow Friends of Israel stall he has noticed a significant increase in the number of Israelis in Glasgow in recent months. He is concerned, however, that they are wary of Scotland, and Sammy is saddened that this is how Scotland is perceived
- LT said that it was coming through that Visit Scotland does not know enough about the Israeli market. The organisation is constantly seeking to learn about new markets, and should be entirely up for learning about Israel. Visit Scotland's goal is to increase the number and frequency of visits, and will look closely at Israel in the future, particularly focusing on encouraging Israelis to venture out of London on their trips to the UK.
- JC thanked LT for his presentation and answers

Other Business

- JC reminded everyone that one of the things discussed at the formation of the group was seeking a joint meeting with the Cross-Party Group on Palestine. JC intends to contact that CPG in order to facilitate such a meeting. Whilst this may be challenging for some, a productive and constructive meeting will underscore that co-existence is possible and desirable.
 - The group agreed with this course of action
- The next meeting will be held in September or October, and will be the AGM.
- JC closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.