

Minutes for CPG, 13 Jun 2018

Number of MSPs – 8

Jackson Carlaw

Richard Lyle

Jamie Greene

Rachael Hamilton

Bill Bowman

Jeremy Balfour

Maurice Corry

Mary Fee

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Non MSPs – As per attendance list for security

Alakbarov	Fuad
Anderson	Sheena
Atkin	Ian
Bett	Danielle
Borowski	Emphraim
Brannan	Micheline
Cohen	Rami
Cohen	Kirsty
Cohen	Ella
Cowan	Jackie
Galloway	Alex
Gibb	Liz
Goodrich	Nigel
Kaufman	Dorothe
Kennedy	Ruth
Kirkpatrick	Lenor
Kusznir	Michael
Lennox	Heather
Lovatt	Stanley
McCroskrie	Daniel
McDonnell	Charlie
Morris	Linda
Rose	David
Silberger	Shirly
Wylie	Wilma
Yedd	Evelyn
Bar Li	Sharon

Welcomes and updates from Jackson

Jackson welcomed Dep Ambassador Sharon Bar Li and gave a few updates since the last CPG Meeting:

Noted that 19.20 tonight - First direct Israir flight from Tel Aviv to Scotland.

Jackson has written to Lord Thurso as Chairman of Visit Scotland to explore what opportunities there are for further collaboration between Israel and Scotland, relating to tourism.

Jackson will be acting Leader when Ruth Davidson is on maternity leave, and Richard Lyle will lead the CPG for this period.

Jackson is to write formally to Anas Sarwar regarding the joint meeting of the Islamophobia and antisemitism CPGs planned for October

A joint letter from the Conveners of the CPG of Building Bridges with Israel was sent to the Conveners of the CPG on Palestine regarding having a joint meeting. In the last few weeks a response has been received from the Co-Conveners of the Palestine CPG. They have discussed and concluded that it is not conducive to their aims and decline at this time.

A talk from Deputy Ambassador, Sharon Bar Li

Sharon noted that last week the UK hosted the Israeli PM in London; and that positive talks were held with Theresa May, Boris Johnson, parliamentary committees, as well as a public speech. She commented on the positive relations between the UK and Israel, and welcomed next week's first ever official Royal Visit where Prince William will be visiting Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Sharon also commented on the record volume of trades between our countries – 25% increase from 2016, and the high volume of collaboration between British and Israeli companies

She stated that Israel is going through a challenging time and noted the two main challenges were Iran and difficulties in the Palestinian Territories. Sharon said the Israeli government view Iran as the regional de-stabilizer and noted the Iranian military presence in Syria is a challenge for Israel. She also said that other regional neighbors feel threatened by Iran. Sharon commented on the Palestinian leadership in Gaza and PA and that until they accept the existence of Israel, the peace process can't advance.

However on a positive note - more Arab governments are speaking to the Israeli government than ever before.

Sharon updated that US envoys will do shadow diplomacy in the region next week.

Jackson commented on the tense situation recently and the international perception of what's happening in Israel and Palestine.

Sharon responded that Hamas rule Gaza strip and govern on all types of issues, choosing to use funds to nurture their war machine , using their own civilian population most of whom are peaceful people and give them financial incentives to get hurt.

14th of May: 40,000 ran to the border fence. Out of 62 casualties, 50 were Hamas militants, 3 were Islamic Jihad.

Sharon said that should she need to choose between the security of Israeli civilians and dealing with bad PR – she would rather take the bad PR and keep people safe.

Jamie Greene MSP asked what steps the Israeli government is taking to minimize risks to civilians; considering people have the right to protest?

Sharon – noted there is no right to protest against Hamas in Gaza. She stated the Israeli military spread leaflets in Arabic to ask people to refrain from approaching the border and engaging in violence. Bus companies in Gaza were asked by the IDF not to bus civilians to border fence. She explained turning to live fire comes at the very end – only once the rest of the non-violent means didn't work.

Bill Bowman MSP asked how do you get this message into the media?

Sharon explained that the narrative is created in the first couple of hours – we do not release to the media information until it is based upon some evidence. Takes time to establish facts and correct information. However we live in a world of social media and within 24 hours, once the facts are established, the story is already out there.

Sharon was asked whether Israel has plans to promote collaboration between Israel and Scotland. She spent the day at the Scottish Parliament and believes the two nations can learn a lot from each other.

In response to being asked how resilient the UK – Israel relationship is, Sharon confirmed she had no intention to meddle in domestic British politics and her job is to work with whatever government is in power – she is willing to have dialogue and sometimes agree to disagree – with any party in power.

Maurice Corry MSP asked about the Iran/Trump view. Sharon said the Israeli Government position was that the JCPOA is not a good deal and that Iran shouldn't be a concern just for Israel. She hopes that the Iranian regime will be persuaded through international pressure to create a new agreement.

Finally Sharon said that Israel is not perfect but that it has more to offer – science, culture, academia, arts, and more.

Jackson Carlaw thanked the Deputy Ambassador for her candour.

Talks from Israelis in Scotland

1. Rami –

Met his wife in Australia; they were quite happy living in the Golan Heights – never planned to leave and move to Scotland. Came for one season to help her father with his business – 18 years ago. Rami said that being an Israeli, the first few years were quite easy. It was a good conversation starter – with no challenges whatsoever

The last few years things have become more difficult. Rami talks to a lot of people every day from all over the world. He said -

“Interesting and challenging. I’m not a political person at all. I don’t think the rest of you know how hard to be an Israeli here and abroad. I refuse to see myself as a victim. The army is compulsory in Israel – whoever you are, you have to join the army. Doesn’t matter who you are, what party you are. When you talk about the army, you talk about the people.

It’s not easy to be an Israeli here; day to day – what my daughter hears on the bus, that Israel is full of Jews and why would you want to go there.

In the last three years you find yourself you have to defend yourself a lot because of where you come from, it’s acceptable to be an anti Israeli. “

2. Danielle –

Speaking about the wider Israeli community in Scotland. Israelis here generally have a positive experience in Scotland, though especially in the past few years, when asked where you are from originally it seems to be controversial answer to say you are Israeli – and many people hesitate due to the possible backlash.

Most people in Scotland are open and accepting but there tends to be a blame culture where Israelis are held accountable for the actions of their government or for people’s perception of what’s going on in the Middle East.

There is a small Israeli community organisation in Scotland, set up as a small organisation under BEMIS, for the Israeli community to have a safe space to hold cultural events. This is not an outward facing organization, and is not aiming to promote Israel; purely a taste of home for Israelis in Scotland.

Israelis are culturally diverse as a population and as any other minority, they should feel safe to celebrate their identity. Noted that events require a lot of security coordination in fear of backlash and this is even when there is no connection to the Israeli state.

The speakers were asked how this can be reversed or improved.

Rami noted that he wondered why people tend to only focus on criticising Israel. Danielle added speaking to people face to face and humanizing the situation a bit more is helpful.

Jackson thanked the speakers and noted that part of the reason the group was formed was to deal with anti-Israel rhetoric, and noted the challenges are quite profound.

The next CPG will be held after the summer recess.