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COMMUNITY BRIEFING

A Monthly Snapshot of the Board

Kislev 5772
December 2011



Dear Friends,

As 2011 draws to a close, there is hardly time to draw breath, such is the intense level of activity at the Board of Deputies. 2012 sees the start of a new triennium, the three year cycle for which Deputies are elected to the Board, and it can still be sobering to hear from members of our community who have little knowledge of what the Board does or why they should be interested in the elections.

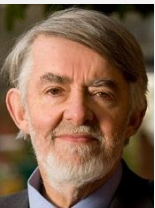
The simple answer is that we do everything! Pretty much any issue that impacts on the community will come our way, and the selection of stories below is only a fraction of our work. So whether it's the things we tend to take for granted – the kosher chicken on a Friday night, the legal framework that allows Jewish charities to cater for our community, our Jewish schools, to name but a few – or whether it's the work we do to respond to threats and challenges of a more overt nature, the community's ability to respond is made possible by the Board.

But here's the even more exciting bit. The Board is not made up of distant, inaccessible unnamed individuals, it's made up of people like you, and if you stand for election for your community, it could be you. There no need, or excuse, to stand on the sidelines and wring your hands about the issues that concern you. You can take an active role in addressing them, by voting in the elections or standing as a Deputy (not forgetting of course the lifeline that keeps us going, paying the modest £25 communal levy included on your shul bill).

The election papers are being sent out to your synagogue or organisation now. Contact your shul office, nag your management board. Make sure that the elections are well publicised and well supported, so that your community has the best possible representation on the Board.

Best wishes,

Jon Benjamin
Chief Executive



Board Responds to Disturbing Comments by Paul Flynn MP

Labour MP Paul Flynn has recently made several public comments and statements in which he calls into question Matthew Gould's suitability for the role of UK Ambassador to Israel given his Jewish background. Mr Flynn has continued by questioning the suitability of British Jews for certain public positions because of the risk that, in Flynn's words, they may "go native". These comments, made in a House of Commons Public Administration Committee Meeting, were then repeated again, in person, to the Jewish Chronicle.

In response, the Board of Deputies, together with the JLC, has released the following joint statement:

"It is deeply disturbing to suggest that certain parts of public service are out of bounds for British Jews and a slur on the professionalism of a British Ambassador who is widely recognised for effectively representing Britain's interests to the people and Government of Israel."



Antisemitism and All That Jazz

The Board wrote to both the Arts Council and the Department for Culture Media and Sport after it was revealed that Gilad Atzmon, notorious for his anti-Jewish views and shunned even by parts of the anti-Zionist left, would be performing at the 'Raise Your Banners festival of political song' in Bradford, which is part funded by the Arts Council.

Although the event went ahead, albeit in a smaller venue due to slow ticket sales, Bradford TUC and local and national anti-racism groups were strongly critical, and the increasing controversy over Gilad Atzmon is now causing ructions within the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

To read the blog by Jon Benjamin, click [here](#).



IAEA Report on Iran

The IAEA report released last month confirms that the regime in Iran is increasingly close to developing a nuclear weapons capability.

The Board has consistently called for stronger sanctions to be applied to Iran by the UK and the EU and welcomed the UK Government's announcement this week that it would be applying further sanctions aimed at Iranian banks.

The Board regularly raises the danger of a nuclear Iran with the FCO, at embassy meetings in London and during our visits to the European Union. This month the Board met with the Danish Embassy in the UK and requested that Denmark, during its Presidency of the EU, make sanctions against Iran a priority issue, especially the implementation of existing sanctions.



Board Offers Practical Support to Grassroots Pro-Israel Initiatives

The campaign to demonise Israel in the UK is a national one and our response must likewise be on a national scale. The Board is proud to be offering practical support for grassroots initiatives across the UK which are promoting Israel's case.

We have recently appointed as consultant, Steven Jaffe, who co-chairs the Northern Ireland Friends of Israel (a fast growing and outward looking campaign group which has 500 supporters enrolled). Over the past few months Steven has been running the Board's 'Speak Out' campaign while also sharing ideas and good practice by meeting with community leaders across the country, from the North East to the South Coast.

Steven says: "My aim is to encourage strategic thinking about how best to promote Israel's case in each local situation. I have been inspired by seeing at first hand new initiatives which are springing up and the amazing work of existing local groups, for example, the Bournemouth Israel group and the Sheffield Israel society".

Steven can help arrange events, source materials, identify training needs and advise on how best to respond to specific challenges at the local level. The Board believes regional communities have a vital role to play in positively promoting Israel's standing in the UK. If your community would like to know more about what is happening and explore what can be done, working together with national community and Israel-related organisations, please email steven.jaffe@bod.org.uk.



Deputies Meet Alistair King Smith

Members of our International Division again met with the Head of the Near East Group at the FCO, Alistair King Smith. These regular meetings provide a useful forum for an exchange of views and ideas, to complement the meetings that the Board also has with other officials and Ministers.

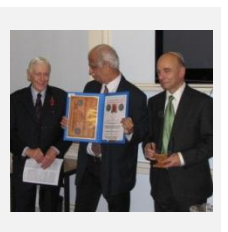
Mr King Smith had just returned to the UK from a trip to the region and so was able to update the group as to his views on the current situation including hopes for a renewed peace process and economic development in Israel and the Territories. The Deputies raised concerns over the UK's decision only to abstain on the vote to admit the Palestinian Authority to UNESCO.



Israeli Medical Association at the European Parliament

Board Executive member Professor David Katz coordinated the Centennial Anniversary of the Israeli Medical Association World Fellowship (IMAWF) in the European Parliament recently, with a symposium and the inauguration of a poster exhibition celebrating a century of activities of the association. The symposium provided participants with the opportunity to learn more about various topics including the IDF field hospital in Haiti and the Hadassah training program in Ethiopia.

The opening of the exhibition was marked by speeches delivered by MEPs Charles Tannock and Miroslav Mikolášik and by David Saranga, Head of the European Parliament Liaison Department at the Mission of Israel to the EU, who praised the positive role of the IMAWF in Israel and overseas.



Samaritan Honour for Board President

Vivian Wineman, President of the Board of Deputies, has become the 2011 recipient of the Samaritan Medal for Peace, Humanitarian and Academic Achievements. The Samaritan Medal Foundation was established in 2005 in Washington DC in order to highlight prominent activists in the world and the Middle East who foster peace between Israel and Palestinians. Previous recipients in the UK include Lord Eric Avebury and Nitza Spiro, both of whom attended the reception. To read the Board statement and comments from Vivian Wineman, click [here](#).



Community Research Almost Complete

A report on community statistics (births, marriages, divorces and deaths), covering the period 2008-2010, is close to being finalised. These data, together with the results of the 2011 census (which are expected to be released towards the end of 2012), will provide invaluable information about Britain's Jewish community at the end of the first decade of the 21st Century.

Analysis is underway of data collected from Jewish primary schools around the country. Parents were asked to provide details of younger siblings likely to be applying for school places over the next few years. These data will be vital in planning for the future provision of Jewish education.



Faith Matters: Interfaith Week 2011

A Blog by the President

As many people will be aware we have recently celebrated Inter Faith week. First introduced in England two years ago - in Scotland the year before - this has now become an established part of the faith calendar in this country.

It is one of the occasions which ought to make us especially proud of our community. Part of the inspiration for the event has come from Mitzvah Day, an idea which has been copied widely particularly by the Hindus. The community was also given an extremely high profile at the opening event with the Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks being one of the two main speakers after the Archbishop of Canterbury. In a sense this is natural. Jews are the oldest non-Christian minority in this country. Moreover unlike most other faiths, we have been a minority in every country where we have been found almost throughout our history. We have always therefore had to contend with the issues of living with other faiths. Indeed it is only with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 that Jews experienced being in a majority in any state with the completely different challenges which that presents.

It was a busy week with a wide range of events. Particularly interesting was the exhibition at the Muslim Cultural Centre in Regent's Park. It illustrated both the positive and negative sides to the relationship between the faiths. On the one hand there were numerous references to Hebrew prophets and the Judaic background to Islam as an Abrahamic faith. Indeed many of the exhibits were actually Jewish including Hebrew Torah scrolls some written in Sephardi, some in Misrahi script some with and some without the familiar crowns on the letters. On the other there were references to the current situation in the Middle East which were to say the least not conducive to mutual understanding.

Most other events that I and other members of the Board of Deputies attended were uncontentious and even uplifting. On Tuesday night Sir Sigmund Sternberg a long- time supporter of the Board was made an honorary fellow of the Hebrew University in recognition of his Inter faith work. This was one of the first times this honour has been awarded outside Israel. It was also an occasion to celebrate the work not only of Siggy but all those in the community have led the way in Inter Faith work.

The week culminated in a piece from the Chief Rabbi showing a foundation for Inter Faith work in the chapters of Genesis which we have just been reading in synagogue. His message was that Judaism did not look well on uniformity particularly when brought about by imperialism and that diversity was something to be celebrated not feared - a fitting end to the week.

