



**Report of Meeting of  
Board of Deputies of British Jews  
Held December 2021**

by Julian Pollard

The Deputies convened in December 2021.

As Magen Avot's Representative Deputy at the Board of Deputies I can provide an insight into the important work currently being undertaken by the President, other Senior Officers and the various Divisions of the Board.

Various Reports are attached in this PDF pack and merit review. Let me highlight points arising:-

- Presidents Report – covers the proscription of Hamas, BBC Bias complaints, the visit of President Herzog, Uyghur Muslim action and a varied Q&A session
- Social Justice Committee Report-covers Refugees and Human Trafficking, Climate Emergency issues, Learning Disability kits for synagogues, Mitzvah Day events, Nationality and Borders Bill issues
- International Division- Israel & Middle East current affairs . Meetings with Boris Johnson and Liz Truss
- Defence & Group Relations- Current antisemitic racism, Interfaith dialogue, defence of Shechita
- Libel and Defamation – a crib sheet how to avoid falling foul of the laws of Defamation

I was asked by a Member to seek clarification of the BOD Report that current Jewish Covid victims now number around 950 and this was their response:-

Hi Julian

Thank you for your email, to which I would respond as follows:

- a) We do not know the age or ages of those who have passed away.
- b) We know some of the locality around the UK but not necessarily in London. Those who have shared this information with us have not given permission for locality so if you would like to know a specific locality, we will have to ask permission before we release it.
- c) The period is from the beginning of pandemic. Around 50 per cent of the deaths were recorded up to May 2020.
- d) We cannot know for certain what caused Jewish people to be disproportionately affected in the first phase. The fact that the community was disproportionately affected in the first wave and not subsequently suggests that the phenomenon was due to something which was an active factor in the first wave but not subsequently. This may be, for example, general guidance not being brought in early enough. The effect of this may have been either that:
  - 1) Large communal events facilitated the spread of Covid 19 or
  - 2) Small, typical but not regular events caused the spreads (eg shiva houses) or
  - 3) General communal activities facilitated the spread (regular synagogue services).

We have no evidence that pandemic mortality is concentrated in any particular part of the community.

Kind regards.

Sara Radivan

Regional Manager

0161 676 8980

I remind Members that I am happy to raise with the Board any issues which concern or worry you

Julian Pollard

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*If any Magen Avot member wishes to bring an issue to the attention of the BOD he or she can do so at any time so please contact me at any time at: [jandjpollard@hotmail.com](mailto:jandjpollard@hotmail.com)*

# PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT

## December 2021

### 1. Announcements

#### **Mazal Tov**

To Radlett Reform Synagogue, which celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in November, with a service and party attended by several of its founding members To Richard Del Monte on the wedding of his son, David

To Joel Rosen on his election as President-Elect of the Union of Jewish

#### Students **2. Hamas Proscription**

In November I warmly welcomed the Home Secretary's announcement that the UK Government was to proscribe Hamas in its entirety as a terrorist organisation. The Board of Deputies has long led the call for this alongside our communal partners.

Full proscription ends the dangerous loophole via which this terrorist organisation can spread its extremist poison here and raise funds and support in the UK. Hamas regularly espouses violent ideology and grotesque antisemitism. It is responsible for countless terror attacks including suicide bombings, the murder of Israeli citizens and others, the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields, repression of political opponents, women, and LGBT people.

We are immensely grateful that it will no longer have any safe harbour or support in the UK. We thank the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, and the Government for this decisive action in tackling extremism.

### **3. Chanukah Parliamentary Reception**

It is three years since the Board of Deputies last held its last Parliamentary Chanukah Reception so it meant a great deal that we were able to welcome MPs and Peers to celebrate the festival with us.

We had plenty reasons to thank them. There has been cross-party support shown on many issues of interest to the Jewish community in recent times. These include ensuring the Coronavirus Bill was amended to avoid the prospect of cremations for Jews and Muslims, as well as support for the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. And most recently, there was wide backing given to the Government's announcement of its intention to proscribe the Hamas terror group in its entirety.

Parliamentary speakers included the Home Secretary Priti Patel and Leader of the Opposition Keir Starmer, the co-chair of the APPG on British Jews, Christian Wakeford MP, as well as representatives from the Liberal Democrats and SNP

In her speech, the Home Secretary spoke about the full proscription of Hamas, saying that this was part of the Government's "sincere commitment to do right by the Jewish community in the UK." I was grateful for the opportunity to thank her in person for the Government's work on this most vital issue for Israel which has the strong support of our community.

We were also delighted to welcome the ambassadors of both Israel and Bahrain, which goes to show how far the Middle East has moved on since the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020.

Israeli Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely spoke of Israel's new strategic partnership, which is great news for the two countries and all of Israel's supporters in the Jewish community.

The Chief Rabbi gave an uplifting address in which he spoke of the centrality of family to the festival of Chanukah before lighting the Chanukah candles and leading a stirring rendition of Maoz Tzur.

Due to Covid restrictions we were unable to invite as many friends, including Deputies, as we have in previous years. All being well, we hope to have a larger gathering next year.

#### **4. Complaint to the BBC**

Last week the Board of Deputies made an official complaint to the BBC about its coverage of an antisemitic incident in London's Oxford Street in which Jewish teenagers on a bus were subjected to abuse. We described it as "deeply irresponsible journalism".

I also sent a letter, addressed to BBC Director General Tim Davie, Chairman Richard Sharp and Director of News and Current Affairs Fran Unsworth, condemning "harmful framings and allegations that we condemn in the strongest possible terms".

The BBC report of the incident referred to the obvious antisemitic acts as mere "allegations" while reporting an unsubstantiated allegation of 'racial slurs about Muslims' as fact.

The allegations made against the Jewish victims are wholly without substance or merit. I wrote: "We investigated every second of footage and we contend that the BBC is mischaracterising a Hebrew cry for help by a distressed Jewish man as a slur in English. We have evidenced this with our own re-enactment of the precise phrasing, cadence, and context of the audio segment in dispute and are fully convinced that the BBC has gotten this spectacularly wrong. Dangerously so. The victims of antisemitic abuse are now being smeared as racists and therefore somehow less deserving of

sympathy or, in the worst case, deserving of the abuse they received. This is deeply irresponsible journalism.”

You can read the full letter [here](#).

## **5. Meetings with politicians**

We have held several meetings with ministers and senior political figures in November and December. These include Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Oliver Dowden MP, Co-chair of the Conservative Party. In addition, we welcomed the Faith Schools Minister Baroness Barran who toured two Jewish primary schools, hosted by us and communal colleagues. I have also held a meeting with Labour Leader Keir Starmer and lit Chanukah candles alongside Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and Mayor of Greater Manchester Andy Burnham.

## **6. Dame Margaret Hodge**

In November, Dame Margaret Hodge MP, the veteran Labour MP whose staunch defence of the UK’s Jewish community has made her a household name, became co chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Jews. As the organisation providing the secretariat to the APPG on British Jews, the Board of Deputies is extremely pleased that Dame Margaret has been elected as the group’s co-chair. Dame Margaret is not just a part of the Jewish community, she is also widely admired for defending our community against those hostile to us. We are honoured that she has agreed to serve as co-chair and look forward to working closely with her in this role.

## **7. President Isaac Herzog**

In November I was delighted to be invited to speak at a breakfast honouring Israeli President Isaac Herzog. In my speech I expressed the deep allegiance that UK Jews have with Israel as well as my strong feelings about the wonderful relationship we British Jews have with Israel. You can read the full speech [here](#).

## **8. Uyghur Muslims**

The Board of Deputies applauded the announcement by the UK Government, that no UK ministers nor officials will attend the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. As we said when we called for such a move in July, the Olympics must not be used as a tool to whitewash the atrocities taking place in China.

Following the judgement of the Uyghur Tribunal, which found the Chinese government has committed genocide, crimes against humanity and torture, I made the following statement in response:

<https://twitter.com/BoardofDeputies/status/1468915952586838021>

## 9. New staff appointments

We have made two key staff appointments in the past month. Daniel Sugarman has been appointed Public Affairs Director. He will be succeeding Phil Rosenberg who departed last week. Daniel has great experience in both public affairs and journalism and has made a great impact since joining the Board as Public Affairs Officer two years ago. We have also appointed Dawn Waterman in the new post of Director of Education and Community Engagement. Dawn, who has been at the Board in a variety of roles for more than five years, has tremendous knowledge regarding both Judaism and our education system. We wish them both every success.

## 10. Covid-19

We now have a new Covid variant spreading quickly around the UK. The Government has announced new restrictions which apply to indoor gatherings at synagogues as well as social events. It is our duty to follow the rules as best as we possibly can and to take up any offers of vaccines so that we can protect both ourselves and our loved ones. We hope that the desperate times we experienced in 2020 are not repeated, and given the advances in vaccines and drug treatments, we have reason to be hopeful that the death toll in our community and around the country will not be as catastrophic as before. As we enter the new year holiday period, I wish you all health and happiness.

## 11. Staff members

Over the last few years, there have been a number of occasions when Deputies have seen fit to publicly criticise the actions or behaviour of members of our staff. Most recently, however, the actions of a staff member were the subject of some discussion during a plenary meeting. I consider that to be totally unacceptable, and I will be instructing Honorary Officers to ensure that any Deputy who attempts to do this at any future plenary meeting will be given short shrift. If any Deputy has an issue with actions or behaviour of a staff member, they should contact Michael Wegier, our Chief Executive.

## 12. Questions from Deputies

*Questions are included in the exact form in which they are received.*

*Name of Deputy:* John Melchior

*Constituency:* Hadley Wood Jewish Community

### **Question**

I was saddened by the recent vote on Jerusalem at the UN, basically denying any Jewish connection to our most holy sites. I was even more saddened that UK didn't vote against the resolution and decided to abstain, but I was most shocked and saddened when I then saw the Board thanking and complimenting our government for their disgraceful attitude. I agree that we should keep very friendly relations with the Government but friends need to be able to tell each other when they do wrong and the

BOD did the exact opposite. All other Jewish organisations and Zionist groups were very critical with the UK decision and we decided to thank them. Please explain the thinking behind this decision and whether you truly believed it was wonderful that UK abstained in this important vote?

**Answer**

Before the recent UN General Assembly vote on Jerusalem, the Board of Deputies was informed via officials that there was a possibility to secure a record bloc of abstentions from European countries if Germany were to lead the way and join the UK's position. We were told 'No' votes were entirely unrealistic due to the way Israel was perceived to have handled the protests at the Temple Mount in May. Ultimately many more countries abstained than we had anticipated - and even pushed two abstentions to no votes (Hungary and the Czech Republic). The position with the UN is now in a better place and there are now possibilities to advance these abstentions to the position of 'no' votes in the future.

To get us to this place, the Board of Deputies spoke directly to the German mission in London and worked with our German sister organisation to push from both sides and we also encouraged the UK Government to play a pivotal role. They spent political capital doing this and it deserves our thanks. We recognise that as this context was not public, our original statement has not been received in the manner it was intended. However, the UK taking this step takes us closer to our government, and others in Europe, voting against these motions. The International Division, under Vice-President David Mendoza-Wolfson's leadership had formed a working group to map where anti Israel votes are going to be happening across the UN, and we will be taking a more proactive approach in a coordinated strategy, with our sister communities, in this area of work.

*Name of Deputy:* Mike Hinden

*Constituency:* Belmont United Synagogue

**Question**

Why did the President feel it was appropriate to thank the government for abstaining in the recent UN vote on Jerusalem, rather than condemning it for not voting against it.

**Answer**

I refer you to the answer given to John Melchior.

*Name of Deputy:* Leigh Dworkin

*Constituency:* Maidenhead Synagogue

**Question**

What was the Board's response to the Government consultation (which ended on Monday 6th Dec) as to whether there should be compulsory welfare labelling on animal products, including whether they had been pre-stunned or not.

**Answer**

Shechita UK leads operationally for the community on the defence of Shechita. Its submission asserted that a labelling system that – with dubious accuracy – delineated between stunned and non-stunned meat would be misleading for consumers and stigmatising to minorities. If such labelling is to be generated it should refer to method of stun – e.g. asphyxiation, electric bolt etc. so that consumers are given full information regarding animal welfare with regard to slaughter. The Board wrote a letter in support of Shechita UK which was included in the submission.

*Name of Deputy:* Karen Maxwell  
*Constituency* Liberal Jewish Synagogue

### **Question**

With respect to the awful experience that our community members had when trying to 'share the light' during chanukah, I know for certain that the vast majority of the muslim community were equally appalled and shamed by this. it feels timely to be taking more concerted and substantial action as jews and Muslims together. I know much has been done - but I do feel that we need to ramp up the collaboration and jointly promote education and understanding across the 2 communities.

### **Answer**

Thank you for raising this important issue. I completely agree that developing deeper links, education and understanding between Muslim and Jewish communities must remain a priority for us, and the antisemitic attack on Oxford Street makes this work even more urgent. Vice-President Amanda Bowman and the Defence Division's Interfaith Working Group are currently developing plans for a national programme of Deputy-led interfaith engagement, with a particular focus on Muslim-Jewish work, and I hope that you will be able to play a leading role in this when the time comes.

*Name of Deputy:* Joseph Grabiner  
*Constituency:* Alyth

### **Question**

In August, the BoD released an important and timely joint statement with JCORE, WJR, and Renne Casin outlining the communities opposition to the government's Nationality and Borders Bill. Can the President update us as to what actions have been taken to campaign against this bill?

### **Answer**

We have requested a meeting with a Home Office Minister to raise these important concerns. I also refer you to the following statement released by us on 8<sup>th</sup> December: "The Board of Deputies of British Jews has long maintained a clear position relating to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

"Many people in the Jewish community came to the UK as frightened and vulnerable young children – some on the Kindertransport – and were welcomed into this country. Perhaps for that reason, our community expect that other communities in need receive the same treatment.

"While we certainly share the Government's desire to break the business model of people smugglers who profit from trafficking vulnerable human beings, there are a number of aspects of the proposed legislation that cause us concern. "We set out some concerns in a joint statement with fellow Jewish organisations JCORE, Rene Cassin, and World Jewish Relief earlier this year. And we reiterate some of these points again here.

"We remain alarmed at the proposal that helping an asylum seeker enter the UK will no longer need to be "for gain" to attract criminal liability. This is problematic, as there are many heroic people in history, such as the late Sir Nicholas Winton MBE, and in the present day, such as the many volunteers and charities who assist asylum seekers, whose actions could be prohibited by this law.

"We are concerned by the proposal to allow the UK to be able to send asylum seekers to a safe third country and to submit claims at a designated place determined by the Secretary of State, which might be modelled on the Australian system of "offshore

processing” for asylum seekers. We suggest that this highly controversial Australian system would not be a desirable model to emulate.

“The proposed legislation appears to criminalise anyone who arrives in the UK through an irregular route, with no provision for people to claim asylum. We share the concerns set out by the Law Society that such proposals may breach our international obligations enshrined in the Refugee Convention, which recognises that people fleeing persecution may have to use irregular means – such as by boat – to travel to safety and should not be penalised for this.

“We ask that these concerns be given due consideration by the Government as the Bill makes its journey through Parliament. The Jewish community, of course, will agree with the Government’s wish to increase the fairness of our system so we can protect and support those in genuine need of asylum. We will be requesting a meeting with a Home Office Minister to raise these important concerns.”

*Name of Deputy:* Joe Millis

*Constituency:* Bromley Reform Synagogue

**Question**

“How are Board policies determined and by whom, and can Deputies vote on policies before they becomes official?”

**Answer**

The principle which underlies all Board decision-making and policies, as captured in our constitution, is that "The Board shall direct its policies to reflect the largest practicable measure of common agreement".

The Board is not a partisan organisation, nor it is one that operates in a vacuum. Its policies need to incorporate the views of a wide range of the community, including minority views, those from parts of the community who are not formally represented in our membership, as well as reflect the positions and approaches held by other communal organisations irrespective if those organisations are formal members of the BoD. We as a community, and the Board as an organisation, are strongest when we articulate positions where that position’s development incorporates as many views as possible.

The formulation and implementation of policy therefore takes many forms, including the views of Deputies in plenary meetings, debates and motions, the work of the divisions, discussions by the Executive and HOs, consultation with other communal organisations and partners and the input of our experienced professional staff.

Candidates for election as, President, HOs, or divisional members often prepare manifestos and briefing documents with specific policy positions. Some Board policies are based on precedents going back years or even decades, which are revisited from time-to-time. Detailed reports on our activities are provided to Deputies, who have at least 40 opportunities a year in plenary and divisional meetings to contribute to this process. Particularly significant issues can be debated at a plenary, or by means of a motion proposed by Deputies.

I would stress that the Board of Deputies like many large democratic frameworks elects its leadership to promote, develop and implement policies drawing from expertise and input from across the divisions and beyond.

Divisions, working groups and committees exist to allow Deputies greater levels of input and scrutiny. Any Deputy can write to / speak with a Divisional Chair to make their voice heard.

*Name of Deputy:* Natasha Hausdorff

*Constituency:* UK Lawyers For Israel

**Question**

"Does the Board of Deputies have a social media policy/policies for staff and/or deputies. If so, please could these policies be made available to deputies."

**Answer**

Staff conduct is governed by employment agreements and the Staff Handbook, which includes a section on Social Media. These are internal and confidential documents between the staff and the Board of Deputies Foundation which employs them. Deputies' activities are governed by the Code of Conduct which states (among other clauses) that Deputies must:

"Treat fellow Deputies, Board employees and others with respect, courtesy, honesty and fairness; act ethically and with integrity and probity;"

"Not harass, bully or unreasonably discriminate against fellow Deputies, Board employees and others;"

"Not bring the Board into disrepute by their actions or activities."

*Name of Deputy:* James Harris

*Constituency:* Stanmore and Canons Park Synagogue

**Question**

"It is outrageous that individual staff members should be singled out both in Board meetings and in forums that they are unable to defend themselves. Deputies should be respectful of Board staff at all times. Will the President commit to referring this issue to the Constitution Committee when it next arises?"

**Answer**

I agree with the sentiments of the question and am happy to confirm my agreement with your suggestion that future examples of Deputies singling out staff members should be referred to the Constitution Committee. Any deputy wishing to complain about a member of the professional team should initially be in contact with our Chief Executive Michael Wegier.



# COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION DIVISION ACTIVITY REPORT

DECEMBER 2021

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## 1. UK Education – Working Group Lead Sheila Gewolb

The response to the circular sent to Deputies asking for volunteers (be they Deputies or others in the Jewish community) to serve on SACREs (Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education) has been phenomenal, with over 20 Deputies responding positively. **Deputy Sheila Gewolb** is working with **Sandra Teacher** in seeking to allocate roles, however, more responses from outside London would be especially welcome!

Additionally, **Deputies Sheila Gewolb, Gillian Moonman and Jeremy Michelson** all attended a meeting of the North North West (NNW) SACRE hub, where 13 SACREs were represented. Topics discussed included ways to engage better with schools, and the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) is looking at supporting local SACREs with their Annual Reports which is a DoE requirement.

The Board will host a SACRE conference on 3 February 2022 via Zoom: 'World Views'- where do we stand? Confirmed keynote speaker is Dr Richard Kueh, HMI Ofsted (Subject Lead in Religious Education). More information will be available in the near future.

**Sandra Teacher ( Education Consultant)** was part of the panel at the Dfe Interfaith Network which discussed the theme of Building Community in Interfaith month. She explained the work of our community in building relationships with both our own schools and within the wider world.

**Sandra Teacher** engaged students from Eastbrook Secondary School in East Dagenham in a Chanukah assembly. She also met with staff from all of the disciplines to discuss an exciting and stimulating learning programme for a Jewish activity week taking place in January.

**Sandra Teacher** has been reviewing educational materials on the teaching of Judaism to ensure that the information is accurate and authentic.

**Sandra Teacher** has been working with the Dfe's Faith communities group to prepare suitable and religiously sensitive materials for the Relationships and Sex Education curriculum.

## 2 Israel Education – Working Group Lead Gary Mond

The Deputies Israel Education session 4 has now taken place and was led by Muki Jankelowitz (an Israeli educator) on the subject of the development of the kibbutzim.

## 3 Holocaust Education / Commemoration – Working Group Lead Gillian Moonman

With regard to the barmitzvah/batmitzvah twinning project, Laurie Rosenberg from Yad Vashem UK, has now produced an information sheet for Deputies, and has agreed to address a plenary in the near future when he will run through the mechanism of the programme. **Deputy Gillian Moonman** met with Alasdair Richardson, Senior Fellow in the Institute of Education and a specialist in Holocaust teaching. The issues of engaging and improving on Holocaust Education in schools have been discussed.

#### **4 Communities – Working Group Leads: Andrew Gilbert (London); Jeremy Michelson (Regional)**

With regard to next year's London borough elections, **Senior Vice President Gary Mond, Deputy Andrew Gilbert** and LJJ Director Daniel Kosky have been meeting with opposition leaders on marginal councils (Barnet, Enfield and Harrow) to discuss how, if their parties take control, their policies will impact on the interests of Jewish residents. A highly successful seminar was also held with Hertfordshire councillors covering all major Jewish community issues, as well as a further meeting with communities across Hertfordshire to examine new Jewish community structures as the Jewish population there grows. **Government, Religion and Regional Affairs Officer Daniel Elton** has been supporting the work on the Hertfordshire councillors' seminar.

**Deputy Jeremy Michelson** chaired a meeting of the Regional Deputies Assembly and there was much thoughtful discussion about the draft of the Local Government Manifesto, with ideas influencing the final version of the manifesto. The Regional Deputies Three Year Strategy was also discussed and how it might dovetail with the Board's Three Year strategy that is being prepared. **Government, Religion and Regional Affairs Officer Daniel Elton** is leading on the Local Government Manifesto.

**Regional Manager Sara Radivan** arranged for Honorary Officers to attend Chanukah events, both online and in person, in regional communities.

#### **5 Wider Community and Deputy Engagement**

50 Deputies attended an online Chanukah Celebration and Social. A monthly meeting of all the regional Jewish Representative Council Chairs and Presidents was convened, chaired by **President Marie van der Zyl**. The Local Government Manifesto was discussed and a Covid 19 update provided.

#### **6 Jewish Heritage – Working Group Lead Sheila Gewolb**

**Director of Education and Community Engagement Dawn Waterman** and **Regional Manager Sara Radivan** have been advising the local authority on a community clean-up project at the Ayres Quay Jewish cemetery in Sunderland, which is due to take place on 17 December 2021.

**Deputy Naomi Ter-Berg** has been to the Wiener Holocaust Library where she has been working with the Library's staff looking at the Board of Deputies' archive material held there to find more about fighting antisemitism in the 1930s for a forthcoming exhibition.

#### **7 Health and Mental Health – Working Group Lead Andrew Gilbert**

**Deputy Andrew Gilbert** met with North London Clinical Commissioning Group and was briefed on how they work, their consultation procedures and the merging of borough operations.

#### **8 Jewish Women's Aid – Working Group Lead Ruth Hart**

Jewish Women's Aid were grateful for the support the Board gave them for the JWA Shabbat which took place on 12-13 November, including excellent messages from Deputies, led by **President Marie van der Zyl**. A meeting with JWA will take place in January to look at further support which we might be able to give. Additionally, **Deputy Ariel Simble** has attended the UJS Convention to run a session for Jewish Women's Aid, on 'creating a consent culture on campus' for Jewish Society students to help them support their societies.

Attendance at previous meeting (8 December 2021) (13): Gary Mond (Chair), Garry Abrams, Brian Bloom, Richard Del Monte, Flora Frank, Sheila Gewolb, Andrew Gilbert, Ruth Hart, Jeremy Michelson, Gillian Moonman, Spencer Nathan, Ariel Simble, Naomi Ter-Berg

Observers (5): Deborah Cohen, Leigh Dworkin, Ruth Freedman, Daniel Hirschfield, Judith Prinsley

Staff (3): Sara Radivan, Sandra Teacher, Dawn Waterman

# DEFENCE AND GROUP RELATIONS DIVISION

## REPORT TO DEPUTIES

### NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2021

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#### 1) Antisemitism

- a) The Board has welcomed the Home Secretary's announcement that the UK Government is proscribing Hamas in its entirety as a terrorist organisation, something we have long called for. Further information can be found in the President's report.
- b) The Board of Deputies has strongly condemned the BBC's reporting of an antisemitic incident on Oxford Street during Chanukah, including making an official complaint to the BBC. Further details can be seen in the President's report. The Board's complaint letter to the BBC can be read [here](#).
- c) **President Marie van der Zyl, Vice President Amanda Bowman and Director of Public Affairs Daniel Sugarman** met representatives of the Royal Court theatre to discuss steps the theatre is taking to address the community's disgust with an apparent longstanding pattern of antisemitic behaviour when it was found that a play about to begin its run at the theatre, *Rare Earth Mettle*, contained an avaricious billionaire by the unambiguously Jewish name of Hershel Fink.
- d) **Daniel and Digital Communications Officer Adam Ma'anit** met a Senior Programme Manager in Twitter's Diversity Partnerships Team to discuss issues of concern about the platform.
- e) **Amanda** participated in the Metropolitan Police's Crime Prevention, Inclusion & Engagement Jewish Community Forum meeting, facilitated by the London Jewish Forum. Issues discussed included the recent graffiti in Camden, the antisemitic incident in Oxford Street and violence against women.

#### 2) Politics

- a) Dame Margaret Hodge MP has become co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Jews, for which the Board of Deputies provides the secretariat. **Amanda** hosted an In Conversation event with Dame Margaret Hodge for René Cassin at the New Horizons Festival where they discussed gender equality and being a feminist MP.
- b) **President Marie van der Zyl, Chief Executive Michael Wegier and Director of Operations Daniel Sugarman**, met Keir Starmer, Leader of the Labour Party, to talk about moving forward in combatting persisting antisemitism among the Party's grassroots, as well as upcoming Parliamentary legislation including the Online Harms Bill.
- c) **Marie, Amanda and Michael** met Oliver Dowden MP, Co-chair of the Conservative Party, to discuss issues of interest to the Jewish community such as Israel, antisemitism and education.

#### 3) Interfaith and Group Relations

- a) **Amanda and Interfaith and Social Action Manager Anthony Silkoff** met Rev. Philip Brooks, United Reformed Church Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, to discuss concerns about Israel-related motions passed at the URC's 2021 conference.
- b) **Outgoing Public Affairs Director Phil Rosenberg** attended a [reception](#) in the House of Lords to celebrate Diwali, hosted by Baroness Verma and the 1928 Institute.
- c) **Anthony** joined the Faith Communities Forum alongside representatives of other faith groups, for a discussion about the Government's levelling up agenda and other current issues of interest.
- d) **Anthony, Adam and Rosalind Copisarow, Deputy for West London Synagogue**, joined volunteers from Nishkam SWAT to serve food to homeless guests on the Strand, Central London. The event was for Inter Faith Week and in advance of Mitzvah Day.
- e) **Amanda and Anthony** joined an online school's interfaith event organised by the Naz Legacy Foundation where **Amanda** spoke with a diverse group of young people about range of topics including the meaning of faith, antisemitism, islamophobia and misogyny on social media.
- f) The Division's Interfaith Working Group met to agree priorities which include providing more support and opportunities for Deputy involvement.
- g) **Marie, Amanda, Anthony and Adam** joined Windrush campaigner Patrick Vernon OBE, Shipwreck hunter David L Mearns, and Senior Partner at Ince Julian Clark, to discuss the BoD's support for the campaign to salvage the historic anchor of the HMT Empire Windrush. The ship

is well known for bringing post-war migrants from the Caribbean to Britain, and also – when the ship was in Nazi hands – transporting many Norwegian Jews to their deaths at Auschwitz.

#### 4) **Religious Freedoms**

##### **a) Shechita**

Some animal welfare measures are currently being considered (mostly due to post-Brexit repatriation of powers to Westminster). In order to defend Shechita, these require monitoring:

i. *Animal Sentience Bill*: Currently in its Third Reading in the House of Lords.

ii. *Animal Welfare (Kept Animals Bill)*: Currently at report stage in the Commons. There are ongoing rumours that amendments will be introduced which will attack Shechita/Halal, but it is unclear what their content is or whether they will indeed be introduced.

iii. *DEFRA labelling consultation*: Defra have launched a consultation to which anti Shechita/Halal campaigners will undoubtedly respond calling for all such meat to be labelled as such. The Board supports Shechita UK's position that any labelling must include method of stun (e.g. asphyxiation, metal bolt etc) to ensure that consumers are fully informed and avoid stigmatisation of minorities.

Deputies may have been alarmed by a [Times report](#) on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December which generally took a negative view towards defence of Shechita. The journalist seemingly ignored the lengthy telephone briefing by Shechita UK, who have published a response here -

<https://www.shechitauk.org/response-to-nss-labelling-poll/>

**Amanda** met Shechita UK and leading Imam Qari Asim to discuss the current situation.

##### **b) Assisted Dying**

Currently, assisted dying legislation is being considered both at Westminster and at Holyrood. Following discussion at an open meeting of the Family Law Group, the current view is not to take a specific position but to be mindful of the potential threat to conscientious objection.

##### **c) Medical Examiners**

**Government Affairs Officer Daniel Elton** attended a roundtable discussion covering to what extent medical examiners could advise coroners on the need for autopsy. More work will be required to push this forward.

#### 5) **Higher Education**

**a)** The HE Working Group is developing closer links with the Union of Jewish Students and Chaplaincy to facilitate Jewish academics helping Jewish students facing problems in their own Universities.

**b)** The Group is concerned about increasing pressure on Universities to adopt the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) instead of or in addition to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition. **International Relations Officer Talia Ingleby** has produced a Briefing being considered by the Group, explaining why the BoD as well as all other leading Jewish communal organisations all continue to support the IHRA definition as the authoritative tool for understanding anti-Jewish racism. It also explains why the JDA is not just unhelpful but specifically aimed at weakening IHRA and muddying the waters, which will only benefit antisemites.

*The Defence Division meeting (Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November) took place after the deadline for submission of this report. Attendees will be recorded in the next Division report.*

**International Division**  
**Activity Report**  
**November-December 2021**

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1) Israel and the Middle East

The Board of Deputies of British Jews is committed to advocating for the security and well-being of the State of Israel. An important component of this is engaging with the leading political parties on the issue of their relationship and support for Israel. Accordingly, **President Marie van der Zyl, Senior-Vice President Gary Mond, Vice-President Amanda Bowman and Chief Executive Michael Wegier** attended the annual lunch of Conservative Friends of Israel, with special guests of honour Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Yair Lapid. Likewise, **Marie, Michael, Public Affairs Officer Daniel Sugarman and International Relations Officer Talia Ingleby** attended the annual lunch of Labour Friends of Israel. Israeli Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely addressed the attendees, as did Parliamentary Chair of LFI Steve McCabe. The Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer, was the Guest of Honour. The Honorary Officers and Chief Executive Michael Wegier also attended a communal breakfast hosted by the Jewish Agency for Israel, for President Isaac Herzog's diplomatic visit to London. President Marie van der Zyl addressed the breakfast, where she described the deep connection that UK Jews have with Israel, as well as how UK Jews echo the diversity of the Israeli political scene. Also attending the breakfast were Israeli Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely and the UK's Ambassador to Israel, Neil Wigan.

An important part of our Israel advocacy is highlighting the diversity and rich history of Israeli society, especially shining a light on the lesser-known aspects of Israeli history, such as the experiences of Jewish refugees from Arab Countries and Iran. That is why **Marie** spoke at Harif, Sephardi Voices UK, and JW3's events marking the November 30 official Memorial Day in Israel, which commemorates the departure and expulsion of more than 850,000 Jews from Arab countries and Iran in the 20th century. Another important component of our Israel advocacy is combatting anti-Israel bias at multilateral organisations, such as the UN. It is for this reason that the Board of Deputies engages with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the UK Mission to the UN and Diplomatic Missions in London to gain a reduction in the number of anti-Israel votes, and for them to be voted against where possible. For the current session of the UN's General Assembly, the Board of Deputies urged the FCDO and the Embassy of Germany, in partnership with our sister community in Germany, to encourage Germany to join the UK in abstaining on a resolution that referred to the Temple Mount as 'Haram al-Sharif' only. Following these engagements, an unprecedented bloc of 12 EU nations followed suit to reject the resolution (which included two 'no' votes from Hungary and the Czech Republic). Accordingly, **David** welcomed this result and thanked the Government and the German Embassy for their dialogue with the Board of Deputies on this matter. On this occasion, it was clear that a larger number of abstentions was achievable, than 'no' votes. However, the result of this motion sets a helpful precedent that David hopes to advance and demonstrated the effective work we can undertake with sister communities, in this area of work.

## 2) Diplomatic Engagement

The Board of Deputies is proud of the relationship it has cultivated with the FCDO. As part of this, **Marie, David and Michael**, along with colleagues from the JLC, held a meeting with Foreign Secretary Lis Truss, where they discussed British-Israel Relations, the Abraham Accords and the threat of Iran to the stability and security of the region. Building on the exciting diplomatic opportunities that have evolved from the Abraham Accords is a priority of the Board of Deputies' peace advocacy. To this end, **David** and **Talia** attended a reception hosted by His Excellency Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the UK, to mark the 'International Day of Tolerance'. This year's focus highlighted the thriving Baha'i community in Bahrain. Lord Mann was in attendance too and gave a special address paying tribute to the coexistence in Bahraini society. Moreover, **David** and **Talia** met His Excellency Mansoor Abulhoul, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the UK, to discuss opportunities to support and promote the Abraham Accords and the flourishing relations between our communities. Also, **Marie, Phil and Talia** attended the United Arab Emirates 50<sup>th</sup> National Day celebration. Furthermore, **David** and **Talia** attended an event at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office focusing on 'Supporting the inclusion and active participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups in democratic processes'. Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office hosted the panel, which also included the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Religious Freedom or Belief Fiona Bruce MP, Nazila Ghanea, Director-International Human Rights Law Programmes at the University of Oxford, and Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Lastly, **David** and **Talia** met the Deputy Ambassador of France, Mr Gerrit Olivier Francois van Rossum. Among items discussed were the promotion and use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism in France, and the tragic murders of Holocaust survivors Mireille Knoll and Sarah Halimi.

## 3) Sister Communities and International Partner Organisations

As part of a global Jewish community, the network of international Jewish partner organisations is an important resource for confronting shared concerns like antisemitism, coordinating messaging, and providing support for sister communities. Consequently **David, Michael** and **Talia** spoke with the Association of Jewish Refugees' Chief Executive Michael Newman, and one of their Deputies, William Baginsky, to discuss how the Board of Deputies can help raise awareness of the funding, social and welfare services that AJR provide to Holocaust refugees and survivors in the United Kingdom, and tie into the Board's international work for Holocaust Restitution. Additionally **Public Affairs Officer Daniel Sugarman** and **Talia** met representatives of the World Jewish Congress to discuss a number of UK-related initiatives. **Talia** also spoke with Julie Decroix, Associate Director AJC Europe, regarding shared concerns including combatting antisemitism in Europe, the campaign for the proscription of Hamas and Hezbollah.

# Social Justice Committee

## Report to the President

December 2021

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Four SJC working groups have been established, and have continued to hold meetings: Learning Disabilities, Climate Emergency, Refugees & Human Trafficking, Mitzvah Day & Practical Action.

The Co-Chairs are currently considering the following proposals within each thematic area (all still to be confirmed):

- Refugees & Human Trafficking:
  - A roundtable or webinar with interfaith partners, to discuss working together to assist refugees
  - Inviting prominent refugee experts to address a Board of Deputies plenary, such as:
    - Lord Alf Dubs
    - Enver Solomon, CEO of Refugee Council
    - A speaker from a Jewish organisation such as World Jewish Relief
- Mitzvah Day and Practical Social Action:
  - Mobilising Deputies and their synagogues to run collections of used laptops for the charity Screen Share, which works to support, inform and advocate for digital inclusion for young refugees, by repurposing used laptops and gifting them to young refugees in the UK.
- Climate Emergency:
  - Conducting an environmental audit of the Board of Deputies, which would include auditing the organisation's processes, premises and investments, for their environmental sustainability and carbon footprint.
  - They will work closely with EcoSynagogue on this, who have offered to adapt their environmental audit for synagogues, so that it can work for an organisation like the Board of Deputies.
- Learning Disabilities:
  - Ensuring their work is joined up with major Jewish organisations in this space
  - Producing a toolkit for synagogues on inclusion of people with learning disabilities (using resources that are already out there from Jewish organisations, existing best practice from communities and consultation with service users)

Other social justice work that has taken place:

- The Nationality and Borders Bill returned to the House of Commons. Following a request by the SJC, the Board of Deputies prepared the following statement raising some serious concerns about the legislation: <https://www.bod.org.uk/bod-news/board-of-deputies-statement-on-the-treatment-of-refugees-and-asylum-seekers/>
- For Mitzvah Day (photos below):
  - Interfaith and Social Action Manager Anthony Silkoff, Digital Communications Officer Adam Ma'anit and SJC member Rosalind Copisarow, Deputy for West London Synagogue, joined volunteers from Nishkam SWAT to serve food to homeless guests on the Strand, Central London.
  - Board of Deputies staff participated in various activities including a video for Jewish Care
  - SJC member Nick Grant organised for his synagogue, St Albans Masorti Synagogue (SAMS), together with local Christian & Muslim groups, to plant 80 trees in a nearby park, donated under the Queen's Green Canopy scheme
  - SJC member Harriet Goldenberg organised a clean-up of Regents Park with members of her synagogue, the LJS.



# LIBEL, SLANDER AND DEFAMATION

## HOW TO AVOID THEM\*

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### What are defamation and libel?

Defamation is any published material that damages the reputation of an individual or an organisation. This covers material on the internet as well as radio and TV broadcasts – so even drama and fiction can be defamatory if they damage someone’s reputation. You can only publish defamatory material if it comes within one of the recognised legal defences (see below). If it doesn’t, the publication will amount to libel and you may have to pay substantial damages. Remember – the Internet sites is not exempt from any libel laws. If you are publishing on the internet you are bound by the same libel laws as print publishers.

### The purpose of libel law

Libel law protects individuals or organisations from unwarranted, mistaken or untruthful attacks on their reputation. A person is libelled if a publication:

- Exposes them to hatred, ridicule or contempt
- Causes them to be shunned or avoided
- Discredits them in their trade, business or profession
- Generally lowers them in the eyes of right thinking members of society

### Get your facts right

The most important point is to make absolutely sure that what you are printing or writing is true. Do not make claims or accusations that you cannot prove. Even if you think you can do this, be cautious. Proving things in court can be very difficult. And the test of what the words mean is what a reasonable reader is likely to take as their natural and ordinary meaning, in their full context – what you intended as the author or publisher is irrelevant. If you write something that cannot be substantiated, the credibility of your site, organisation or cause may be questioned. It can also land you with an expensive lawsuit and there is no legal aid for libel cases. The burden of proof lies with the defendant.

Almost uniquely in English law, in libel cases the burden of proof lies with the author / publisher and not the complainant. In other words, you have to prove that what you write is true. The person you’ve targeted does not have to prove that you’re wrong.

### Some Tips

- Libel is ‘defamation in a permanent form’
- Don’t rely on the literal meaning

\*Please note this document is for information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice

- You cannot solely rely on proving that your statements were literally true if, when they're taken as a whole, they have an extended, more damaging meaning. Also, for example, if somebody was guilty of fraud once, calling him a fraudster in a way which might suggest he's still doing the same may well give rise to a libel which can't be defended. Be especially wary when referring to events in the past. Don't exaggerate in your claims or language.
- Innuendo can catch you out - Your comments may not appear particularly defamatory taken at face value, but greater knowledge of a person or situation may make it problematic because of the innuendo.

## Common mistakes and assumptions

### Repeating rumours

It is inadvisable to repeat a defamatory rumour unless you are in a position to prove it's true. Even if you are contradicting the rumour you should not repeat it. And adding 'allegedly' is not enough to get you out of libel difficulties.

### Quoting others

If you publish defamatory remarks about people or organisations made by other people you will be just as liable to be sued as they are. So if you can't prove the truth of their statements, don't repeat them.

### Drawing unprovable conclusions

It is a common mistake to draw unverifiable conclusions from the basic facts.

### Irresponsible adjectives

Be very careful about the adjectives you use. A misplaced word can result in costly action.

### Representing all sides

Presenting all sides of an argument is often good practice but is not a defence against publishing defamatory remarks made by or about those involved.

## Defences against libel

The law lays down a number of ways in which defamatory publications may be defended. If the defences succeed, the publisher wins. But if they don't succeed, the publisher loses: the complainant will have been libelled and will therefore be entitled to be paid damages and their legal costs. The defences are listed below.

### Justification

The most usual defence against libel is to prove that the information published is true. But this can be a dangerous route because an unsuccessful plea could increase the damages against you because you will have increased the harm to the complainant. And remember, you must be able to deal with every libellous possibility, such as inference and innuendo. If your statement infers something greater, it is not enough to prove that the statement is just literally true. Merely asserting something will not be sufficient to prove that it's true – you will need witnesses and documents to back up assertions (whether they're yours or someone you're quoting).

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### Fair comment

Fair comment covers content, mainly opinion, that cannot by its very nature be true or false. To be properly defensible, these comments must be:

- Based on fact
- Made in good faith
- Published without malice
- On a matter of public interest

### Privilege

Privilege is the defence where the law recognises that individuals should be free to speak their minds (and others to report what they say) without fear of being sued even if they get their facts wrong. It allows people to speak freely in court proceedings and debates in Parliament, and allows for such proceedings to be reported, so long as the reports are both fair and accurate.

### If a complaint is made

Remember the burden of proof lies with the author

What follows does not constitute legal advice, but if a complaint is made against you or your campaign, you could consider one or more of the following steps, depending on how serious the complaint is or how far you wish to pursue your case:

- Take legal advice as soon as possible and before responding to the claimant
- Check the original statement and any associated investigative work collected before it was written
- Consider withdrawing the original statement if, after checking, you think your words were mistaken
- Perhaps do further investigative work to help explain your position
- Keep all drafts and supplementary documentary evidence
- Ensure all those involved in the writing and research of the statement are aware of the situation and aware they may have to provide evidence or statements
- Inform your insurers, if you have libel insurance, and comply with their requests

### What is slander?

Also known as oral or spoken defamation, slander is the legal term for the act of harming a person's reputation by telling one or more other people something that is untrue and damaging about that person.

### Top Tips for Avoiding Slander

- Be careful what you say – it's not always what you say but the way you say it that can lead to a claim. Look for what an ordinary person will read between the lines and do not repeat statements you cannot prove as true
- Control meaning. Do this by purging ambiguity
- The truth is out there – make sure facts are checked and your sources are impeccable

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- Honest opinion is OK
- Phrase your comments carefully – believe, claim, allege, quote facts or statistics according to. You want your audience to understand you are offering an opinion, not facts – and don't forget opinion is one defence against defamation
- Separate facts and opinion so meaning is not blurred
- Keep quiet if you can't prove the facts – better say nothing if you suspect wrongdoing that you cannot prove
- Act ethically – check facts, don't make wild accusations and behave responsibly. If you slip up and defame someone, offer an apology – but speak to a lawyer or your professional indemnity insurer first

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