

Election Manifesto

A guide to issues relating to Christian-Jewish relations in the General Election



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Antisemitism and Other Hate Crimes
3. Religious discourse and Representation in the Media
4. Religious Education
5. Religious Freedoms
6. Holocaust Commemoration and Education
7. Modern Day Global Atrocities and Injustices
8. The Role of Interfaith Organisations in Carrying Out Social Action
9. Issues relating to Israelis and Palestinians

Introduction

CCJ's 2015 Manifesto is a joint Christian-Jewish manifesto of political issues, outlining the areas in government and politics that are of greatest concern to these religious communities, both separately and together. We hope this document will provide a basis for shared Jewish and Christian values and concerns within the sphere of government and politics.

This manifesto delineates what we feel are important issues for the incoming government in the 2015 election with regards to interfaith and religious matters, and identifies areas in which we hope the incoming government will act. We have listed these under 'action points,' which suggest what we hope the incoming government will do to support our aims.

Our members are active in engaging their local candidates with the issues that matter to them and the wider Jewish and Christian communities. At the end of each section we have included a 'question for candidates'; These are suggested questions that our members could ask candidates standing in their local constituencies.

Antisemitism and Other Hate Crimes

When CCJ was founded in 1942 by Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz and Archbishop William Temple, one of its core aims was to combat antisemitism, and, through increasing dialogue between Jews and Christians, to educate against the ignorance that causes and allows for antisemitism to continue. Seventy years after the end of the Second World War, antisemitism is still an issue of grave importance, and recent events have confirmed that CCJ's work in this area is as crucial as ever.

The January attacks by jihadi terrorists in France at a kosher supermarket confirms that the danger of antisemitism extends far beyond verbal insults or petty crimes. Both from the extremist Islamist community and from the far left of the political spectrum, the threat of antisemitic violence has not been higher since the Second World War.

CCJ is very grateful for the work the government has done so far in combatting antisemitism. We feel supported by the efforts of the All-Party Parliamentary Committee Against Antisemitism, and the government's continued commitment to refuse to tolerate antisemitism. Despite the great work that has been done in this area, antisemitism in Europe is indeed on the rise and so we hope that such efforts are maintained against this rising threat.

The Home Office has reported an increase in all five classifications of hate-crime from 2012/3 to 2013/4 in England and Wales (crimes motivated by race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and transgender identity). The majority of reported hate-crimes reported (84%) were racially motivated, which increased by 4% between the two studies, whilst religiously motivated hate-crime increased by 45%.¹

CCJ would hope that any government takes a strong stance against antisemitism. Hate-crimes of any form should not be tolerated, and antisemitic incidents, whether verbally offensive, physically harmful, or simply outward demonstrations of hostility or hatefulness, should be treated with the utmost severity.

Action Points

We would suggest that the United Kingdom government continue to work alongside the Jewish community and organisations such as the Community Security Trust in order to grapple with the problem of antisemitism. It is a real tragedy that some Jewish people have begun to question whether there is a future for European Jewry due to antisemitism, as we believe that much of UK antisemitism can be prevented with the help of a supportive government and a vigilant public.

CCJ wishes for the government to continue to support those at risk of hate-crimes, and ensure that all groups feel protected in the United Kingdom. The government must not only work to combat violence when it emerges, but act to prevent hateful speeches and the spreading of hateful or intolerant beliefs via other means, particularly social media.

Question for Candidates:

What can the government and police do to ensure people are protected from antisemitism and other hate-crimes?

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/364198/hosb0214.pdf

Religious Discourse and Representation in the Media

A lack of understanding and respect for other cultures and beliefs can lead to poor public discourse about religion. Many religious groups have specific, varied beliefs and traditions that, if not fully understood, are often mocked or disrespected. CCJ believes that people of religious traditions have a right to request that their beliefs and customs be taken seriously in public discourse. Furthermore, whilst the principle of freedom of speech is crucial to democratic societies, we believe that people should take care not to use derogatory terminology or violently attack the beliefs of another group.

In public discourse about religion, terms that marginalise or demean particular groups should be avoided. Words that are exclusively used to insult or ridicule others have no place in discourse about faith matters. Many view it as acceptable to insult or attack the traditions or beliefs of certain groups on the grounds that their own views are superior. Such attempts at discourse are not sincere efforts to engage in thoughtful discussion and have no place in a public forum.

The media has a crucial role to play in educating the public on religious issues. When portraying people of different religions in the media, it is easy accidentally to cause offence or upset if one is not knowledgeable enough about a specific faith or group. In general, media publications and broadcasts should avoid espousing stereotypical views that typify people of a specific tradition.

Every religious tradition is broad and complex, and no belief system is simply one monolithic entity. If a publication or broadcast is portraying a certain denomination, it should be clear which denomination is being referred to, in order that confusion between specific sects and a wider belief system not be made.

Action Points

CCJ would ask government to re-affirm its commitment to protecting people of all faiths, particularly religious minorities, from hateful or demeaning content levied against them. Simultaneously, we would wish for governments to maintain an approach to media that preserves freedoms of speech, but that encourages public discourse about religion to be respectfully conducted.

Question for Candidates:

What can be done to protect the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in the UK?

Religious Education

CCJ believes that a greater level of religious literacy is needed amongst the British public. We believe that education about other religions deserves an important space in the national curriculum, and schools should equip students to understand the beliefs and cultures of other peoples. Religious studies are an imperative part of a child's education, teaching them how to interact with members of British society from many backgrounds, and fostering an appreciation for others' cultures and beliefs.

It is worrying that many educators see Religious Education as a less valuable part of the curriculum. CCJ would argue that Religious Education is vitally important to British students, encouraging them to engage fully with people of all cultures in society, and preparing them for the multicultural world they will encounter when leaving school. According to the 2011 census, 68.1% of British people identified with a specific religious faith, and to ignore this element of British society in education would constitute a huge misrepresentation of the British public.

CCJ believes that a competent religious education programme does not aim to encourage students to engage in a particular belief system; rather, it encourages them to value and respect those of other cultures and backgrounds, understanding that they can learn from such groups of people. Diversity has become a central element of British culture, and separating religion from discussions about cultural diversity is a dishonest reflection of British society.

Religious Education should also reflect the cultural diversity of the local community, and so the most widespread religions within a geographical region should be discussed in its school's R.E. programmes. This will have the practical application of allowing children to engage in interfaith dialogue with those in their geographical communities, allowing them to become more involved in a diverse, yet vibrant and cohesive community. Well taught Religious Education in schools will increase tolerance and understanding between citizens when students reach adulthood, and will short-circuit many problems that lead to hateful behaviour born of ignorance or incorrect perceptions of religious people.

Action Points

CCJ hopes that the government will give an important role to religious education in its National Curriculum, and will encourage students to become more religiously literate both inside and outside of the classroom. CCJ also hopes that curriculum measures will not deter good candidates from training as R.E. teachers, nor students from accessing qualifications in this subject.

Question for Candidates:

Will a candidate promote religious literacy outside of the educational system?

Religious Freedoms

CCJ is committed to defending the rights of religious people to practice their faith and hold their own beliefs. The United Kingdom is home to people of many faiths and cultures, and it is imperative to the well-being of society that people feel at liberty to express their own faith how they choose (provided their practices fit within the laws of the United Kingdom).

We are encouraged by the government's recent affirmation that it will defend the right to practice religious slaughter, and we would hope that government continue its commitment to maintaining important religious freedoms such as Kosher/Halal slaughter, and male circumcision, which is an important rite not only in Islam and Judaism, but in some Christian denominations too. Governments should ensure that employers and work environments are accommodating to people with specific religious requirements, for example with regard to taking leave for religious holidays.

Conversely, CCJ takes an uncompromising stance against extremism and the spreading of hateful ideologies. We would hope that any government decries any movement that seeks to bring harm to others or spread violence

Action Points

CCJ hopes that the government will continue to defend the rights of religious groups to practise their beliefs, particularly ensuring that religious minorities are protected in this manner. We advocate that in cases where citizens of the United Kingdom portray support for extremist groups, the situation be considered with great severity. Extremist and terrorist organisations, whilst motivated by religious ideology in certain cases, must not be classed alongside genuine religious beliefs, but seen as perversions of mainstream religions. Similarly, we would hope that governments understand that extremist groups do not represent the entirety or even majority of any religious tradition, and their actions should not tarnish the reputation of genuine faiths.

Question for Candidates:

Will a candidate defend the right to practise religious observances that have come under attack in recent times?

Holocaust Commemoration and Education

The commemoration of the Holocaust forms a vital part not only of CCJ's work, but the work of many other religious and interfaith institutions in the United Kingdom. We are living in the last generation where Holocaust survivors will be present, and alternative methods of education now need to be established to preserve the legacy of Holocaust commemoration. As such, we would ask that any United Kingdom government ensures its continued commitment to preserving the memory of the Holocaust, and supporting Holocaust education initiatives.

We believe that Holocaust education can be a powerful tool in encouraging students and youngsters to speak out against injustices and human rights abuses around the world, and CCJ supports the notion that Holocaust education should indeed be used to inspire action against human rights abuses. Furthermore, with a troubling rise in antisemitic incidents that have invoked the Holocaust and the Nazis, we urge that Holocaust education continue to be used as a tool to combat antisemitism and ignorance.

CCJ believes that Holocaust education must examine other historic and recent genocides, such as those of Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia. Without a complete picture of history since the Holocaust, internalising and applying the lessons one can take from it is more difficult. For this reason, education about modern-day worldwide atrocities is also fundamental part of the discussion of the Holocaust, emphasising the difficulties in making 'never again' a reality, and encouraging students to contribute however they can to combatting such injustices. In this regard, Holocaust education should also contain a practical focus, encouraging students to consider what lessons, personally and for society, they can learn from these historical tragedies.

Action Points

CCJ was very encouraged by the project announced on Holocaust Memorial Day 2015 by the Prime Minister, which pledges a new Holocaust memorial and learning centre in Central London, which we hope will be actively supported by future Parliaments. CCJ hopes that future governments will continue to support initiatives relating to Holocaust commemoration and education, including the establishment of Holocaust Education as a vital aspect of the national curriculum.

The government of the United Kingdom should continue to work to support initiatives that combat international crimes against humanity such as human trafficking and slavery, which persist in some areas of the world.

Question for Candidates:

How will a candidate show commitment to the aims of Holocaust Education and Commemoration?

Modern Day Global Atrocities and Injustices

In spite of the atrocities the world has witnessed in the past, human rights abuses and minority persecutions still occur in many areas of the world today. Persecution of religious minorities is still carried out in areas of the Middle East; concentration camps are still used for political prisoners in North Korea; and the most basic civil liberties are repressed by the military dictatorship in Myanmar (Burma). CCJ hopes that a strong international community will be able to stand up to human rights abuses across the world, and believes that the United Kingdom must remain an important voice in such a discussion.

It has become apparent that, across Europe, the Muslim community as well as the Jewish community has become increasingly concerned about anti-religious hatred, with the rise of far right-wing Islamophobic groups coming to prominence. Many Islamophobic groups base their opinions of Islam and the Muslim community on fundamentalist and extremist groups that do not in any way represent the majority of Muslims. CCJ supports the notion that all groups have the right to practice their religion peacefully, without having to fear that their liberties might be compromised by the actions of extremists with whom they do not identify.

Of 196 countries studied between October 2012 and June 2014, 81 religious freedoms were found to be repressed or were in decline. The situation of the Christian community in the Middle East is of particular concern to CCJ, and the persecution of Christians in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere in the region was recently described as an 'indescribable tragedy' by Prince Charles.

Action Points

CCJ urges that the United Kingdom continues to denounce the persecution of religious minorities around the world, and seek to aid the Christian, Yezidi, and other minority communities in Iraq and Syria who are at immediate risk.

Question for Candidates:

How does a candidate think the citizens of the UK can help to combat social injustices and human rights abuses abroad?

Role of Interfaith Organisations in carrying out Social Action

CCJ believes that interfaith organisations have a crucial role to play in cultivating a cohesive, diverse society where people of different faiths and backgrounds can interact together in spite of their distinct beliefs and practices. Although CCJ is a bilateral organisation working primarily on Christian-Jewish relations, our work extends to include people of many faiths and backgrounds, and we endeavour to work with other interfaith partners.

Interfaith organisations and cross-faith initiatives also have an important place in co-ordinating social action events and engaging in community improvement. All religious traditions share a passion for charity, and many see charitable acts as part of a wider mission of world improvement. In Judaism this is known as 'Tikkun Olam,' or fixing the world, and in Christianity this is described as working to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Interfaith social action events solidify community relations and create strong bonds between faith groups within communities that engender a close and tight-knit social network. Moreover, they inspire people of different faiths to examine their common values, learning that all religions cherish kindness, charity, and caring for others in the community.

Social action in and of itself can take many forms, including rallies or protests to support social justice causes; acts of charity or fund-raising drives; volunteering fairs and community improvement work. All these initiatives provide chances for faith groups to come together and demonstrate how important religious values are to community life.

One of the reasons it is crucial that interfaith social action takes place is that it ensures no faction or section of the community is ignored. Whilst intra-religious charity is a vital part of each faith's community, inter-religious social action is also vital to provide support to the wider community, ensuring that no-one is excluded and help is available to all. Through interfaith social action, CCJ believes that communities can become more united and greater appreciation between religious groups can exist.

Action Points

CCJ endeavours to incorporate social action initiatives into many of its campaigns as part of our new strategic vision. CCJ would ask that the United Kingdom continue to support the work of interfaith organisations, particularly in encouraging social action, and understands the importance and scale of the task interfaith groups are attempting to accomplish. Government has an important role to play in encouraging individuals to strive continually to improve their community and society, and CCJ believes there is much work interfaith organisations can do alongside the government to effect positive social change.

Question for Candidates:

How will candidates support interfaith events and create community cohesion between people of different faiths?

Issues relating to Israelis and Palestinians

CCJ commends attempts both internationally to negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, and by the people working on the ground towards peace and co-existence in difficult circumstances. CCJ supports both Israelis and Palestinians in their desires to attain a just and peaceful solution.

CCJ supports all attempts to foster peaceful discussions with a view towards creating a lasting settlement between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. We support the continued right of the State of Israel to exist as a homeland for the Jewish people, and simultaneously advocate a peaceful settlement that will enable the Palestinian right to self-determination.

The CCJ has a unique position in dialogue about Israel and Palestine as a bilateral organisation holding views from both Jews and Christians. We strive to provide an informed view of the conflict, taking into account voices from a full range of viewpoints. We aim to draw on the traditions of both Judaism and Christianity to demonstrate the religious virtues of peace.

Another important issue for CCJ is that of the Arab citizens of Israel, a significant number of whom are Christians. CCJ regards all citizens of Israel and residents in the Palestinian territories as equals, and believes they should have equal social and economic opportunities as well as civil liberties.

Action Points

CCJ believes that the government of the United Kingdom has an important role to play with regards to the issue of Israel and Palestine. We would hope that the government will work to encourage people to engage with a full range of viewpoints, and not promulgate an overly-simplified reading of this complex issue.

CCJ hopes that the United Kingdom will continue to take a strong lead in promoting a peaceful resolution and be an active voice in the peace process. Finally, we see it as imperative that the government encourages community cohesion, by supporting interfaith and cross communal initiatives, such as those of CCJ, which look to prevent issues pertaining to the conflict in the Middle East dividing communities in the United Kingdom.

Question for Candidates:

How will candidates prevent tensions surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict from dividing local communities?



DIALOGUE
SOCIAL ACTION
EDUCATION



The Council of Christians and Jews
Collaboration House
77-79 Charlotte Street
London
W1T 4PW

Registered Charity Number: 238005