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Campaign Against Misrepresentation in Public Affairs, Information and the News

Canon Stephen Knott
Archbishop's Secretary for Appointments
Lambeth Palace
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17 March 2025

Dear Canon Stephen Knott

We write in representation of over 630 UK Jews who, in September 2024, wrote to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, expressing our deep concern at his failure to engage with the full diversity of Jewish opinion on Israel and Palestine, both religious and secular.

We and the 630 signatories were, and are still horrified by Israel's disproportionately violent response to the Hamas attack of October 7th 2023. We note in this regard that this has led to Israel being arraigned before the International Court of Justice, ICJ, accused of genocide, and to the International Criminal Court issuing a warrant for the arrest of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Galant on charges of War Crimes. The ICJ has already ruled that Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank is illegal and should end forthwith. We strongly support the ICJ and the ICC in their efforts to hold both Israel and Hamas to account.

Appointment of a new Archbishop of Canterbury

In this period of public consultation and reflection as to the qualities, skills and commitments required of a new Archbishop of Canterbury, we urge the Church of England (CoE) that these should include a rooted commitment to engaging with the diversity of Jewish opinion, not least those who are critical of Israel; and, as importantly, to hear and respond to Palestinian voices.

Whilst it may initially seem odd that Jews are making representations to the process of appointing a new Archbishop of Canterbury, it should not be thought so. The specifically Established Church of England fulfils a formal role in the governance of the country, not least by virtue of the 26 House of Lords' seats allocated to Bishops of the CoE. Beyond this, the CoE, by virtue of its status as an Established church, plays a role as an arbiter of public and state morality more generally. In the light of this, a new Archbishop of Canterbury must avoid a bias in favour of a stridently, pro-Israel lobby – this for the sake of Palestinians; but

also for Jews who are horrified at being associated with the actions and utterances of the UK Jewish Establishment.

We are concerned that the Church of England has, until now, given the impression of harbouring an institutional bias that defers to the 'official' voices of British Jewry, the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BoD) and the United Synagogues' Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis. They regularly insist that they are the sole legitimate representatives of UK Jews, and that other Jewish voices, which they do not hesitate to denigrate, must be ignored.

In fact, the BoD and Chief Rabbi Mirvis represent only a minority – between 30% and 40% of the British Jewish community. Jews who are not members of United Synagogues or other BoD-affiliated organisations are not represented. It is therefore alarming that the Church of England has, in its recent past, given the impression that it ignores Jewish voices other than those of the BoD and Chief Rabbi Mirvis.

Attributing, to all British Jews, the views of the BoD and Chief Rabbi Mirvis, perpetuates the misleading impression of the UK Jewish community as a monolithic bloc. This falsehood harms community relations, not least because it plays to the antisemitic trope that Jews, by our very nature, are of one mind in pursuit of self-serving aims.

We therefore urge that the Church of England, in reflecting on the qualities required of a new Archbishop of Canterbury, should include among these a commitment to engage with the diversity of Jewish opinion, not least opinion critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Spiegall David Mond