

**Jewish
Social
Action
Forum
General
Election
Manifesto
2010**

The Jewish Social Action Forum (JSAF) is a body made up of organisations within the UK Jewish community that are committed to Social Action. The Forum promotes Jewish involvement in national and global issues that are of universal concern. The Forum works on a variety of issues, examples include Fairtrade and Climate Change, with each organisation contributing in a way that reflects their organisational strengths.

JSAF aims:

- To inspire and educate the community about issues related to social action.
- To share best practice in the field of social action within the Jewish community.
- To advance the field of social action within the Jewish community.
- To collaborate on joint projects when and where appropriate.
- To learn from leaders in the field of social action.

This election manifesto has been produced by members of the Jewish Social Action Forum¹. It reflects our concerns as organisations promoting Jewish values of charity, justice and the notion that all human beings are created equal.

¹ The manifesto does not necessarily reflect the beliefs and policies of all members of JSAF

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1. Climate Change

The Jewish religion strongly believes in the notion of stewardship – that the world does not belong to us but that it is our responsibility to protect it for future generations. In the run up to the Copenhagen Climate Conference we launched a community wide climate change campaign on-line through the Big Green Jewish Website.

Many Jewish schools and synagogues have launched their own climate change initiatives in order to encourage environmental awareness amongst members of the community. Communal organisations are committing time and resources to implementing sustainability measures, reflecting a growing desire to ensure our community acts responsibly and sustainably.

We are increasingly concerned at the lack of action at both a national and international level to ensure that legally binding targets are put in place to ensure that we can keep the world's temperature below the internationally agreed target of 2°C. COP15 in Copenhagen at the end of 2009 did not deliver the ambitious deal so desperately needed.

We urge the next government to take leadership both within Europe and globally to ensure that legally binding targets are set and agreed to by COP16 in Mexico.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to:

- Put the UK on track to reduce UK greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, and 80 per cent by 2050.
- Commit to strong UK leadership at the highest levels in the EU and globally, to deliver EU energy and climate targets and to ensure global greenhouse gas emissions are falling by 2015.
- Provide the UK's fair share of finance for adaptation, low-carbon development of at least US\$160 billion a year and ensure that this funding is additional to official development assistance (ODA) and channelled through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) supporting the poorest countries to adapt to and mitigate against climate change.

2. Conflict and Peace

As a community that has suffered at the hands of the world's silence, we have taken an active role in campaigning to end the conflict in Darfur, West Sudan.

In 2007 we produced a guide to the conflict in Darfur which was circulated amongst global Jewish communities and reprinted in 2009 in Canada. The guide was used to educate and inspire members of our community to take action to end the violence. As a result we have close relations with the Darfuri community in the UK, offering support, befriending and advice where appropriate.

We are increasingly concerned with the spike in violence in South Sudan during 2009, with over 2,500 people killed and 350,000 displaced. In Darfur, millions continue to suffer daily in camps. Without adequate preparation, the upcoming national elections and referendum on southern independence could re-ignite conflict between north and south Sudan, with broader implications for regional stability.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to act urgently to promote a sustainable peace in Sudan during this critical year:

- Coordinating with other governments and the UN to support the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.
- Supporting the parties – North, South, East and Darfur – to continue dialogue and prepare for the post-referendum period in 2011.
- Ensuring that the protection of civilians in Sudan becomes an international priority.
- Addressing the human rights concerns at the root of the conflict.

3. Ending Global Poverty

The Jewish religion teaches that the best possible way to give *Tzedakah*, charity, is by giving someone the means to be self-reliant. A significant and increasing number of people in the Jewish community are committed to supporting overseas aid efforts. In particular, politically active young people in their 20s see themselves as global citizens, acting through a Jewish prism and inspired by their faith. These trends in the community appear to mirror trends in other faith communities.

The UK has set a clear timetable of reaching the goal of contributing 0.7% of its Gross National Income (GNI) to overseas aid by 2015. This was legislated in the 2006 International Development Act. This not only sets an example to other countries, but will also make a significant impact to the lives of billions of people. According to the UN Millennium Project's analysis, if all developed countries committed to providing 0.7% of rich world GNI, this would provide enough resources to meet the Millennium Development Goals. This would reduce extreme poverty, child mortality rates and fight disease such as AIDS.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on the next government to:

- Uphold the commitments enshrined in the 2006 International Development Act, ensuring that the UK contributes to upholding the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2009 the Jewish Guide to Fairtrade was published, outlining the Jewish community's commitment to trade justice. However, despite the Fairtrade Mark receiving global recognition, farmers in the developing world have faced a tough year with increased food prices and severe economic crisis. We believe the next government should ensure that sales of Fairtrade goods are sustained during this difficult period to help provide farmers with significant new markets and a stable income.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to:

- Provide financial incentives to sustainable enterprises, including fair trade, as part of a long-term strategy for engaging the private sector in poverty reduction.
- Step up its scrutiny of EU trade policy, and advocate more effectively for pro-poor trade policy at a European level.
- Be prepared to intervene to curb unsustainable trade practice, which could include a requirement for directors of medium and large companies to report on their social and environmental performance.
- Encourage businesses to open up new market opportunities for marginalised farmers in the developing world.

4. Equalities

The Jewish approach to equality is informed by the concept that all people are created in the image of God, and therefore have inherent worth and dignity. As a group that has faced the worst forms of discrimination, we also appreciate the need for robust legislation to protect minorities from abuse. We feel fortunate to have made our home in Britain – a diverse liberal democracy – where we can practise our religion freely and play an active role in wider British society.

We are supportive of the Equalities Bill in its attempt to consolidate equality and anti-discrimination laws. The new provision against multiple discrimination is a helpful step; it is essential to take account the treatment of a whole person, not just one aspect of their identity.

However, we note with concern the results of the recent Hills Report and the Marmot Review. Both these reports show deep-rooted inequality in British society and show that socio-economic background is one of the strongest indicators for life outcomes. It is a disgrace in modern Britain that the accident of one's birth has so much bearing on the date of one's death. We are also mindful that the recession will have hit hardest some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to:

- Support the Equalities Bill and ensure that, when passed, it is brought into force as soon as possible.
- Commit to ending child poverty by 2020.

5. Human Rights

We would like to reinforce our support and appreciation of the Human Rights Act. The Human Rights Act has provided an important legal underpinning for fundamental rights in the UK, reflecting the European Convention on Human Rights.

Evidence shows that the Human Rights Act has had a positive impact on people's lives, leading to many significant improvements in the way that individuals are treated throughout society. There is also strong public support for the human rights that are protected by the Human Rights Act.

Human rights and the Human Rights Act are frequently misunderstood or misrepresented. The media is often responsible for misreporting of issues connected with the Human Rights Act. It is particularly important that public officials have a clear and accurate understanding of what the Human Rights Act requires them to do, including the positive obligations that public authorities have to protect human rights.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to agree that:

- Any new or additional Bill of Rights must build on the Human Rights Act, both in terms of substantive protections and enforcement mechanisms.
- Human rights by definition apply to all human beings, they are universal and do not depend on a person's immigration or citizenship status. It is essential therefore that everyone in the UK, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, should continue to enjoy equal protection of their human rights. Human rights must not be made contingent on behaviour or upon fulfilling certain responsibilities.
- Further work is needed to clarify misunderstandings of the Human Rights Act. We believe that the Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission should play central roles in challenging misrepresentations.

6. Sanctuary and Refuge

The Jewish community knows only too well how important refuge and sanctuary can be for survival. We are commanded 36 times in the Torah to look after the stranger – no other commandment is repeated this many times. It is for these reasons that many in the Jewish community passionately believe that one measure of a healthy society is how it treats its asylum seekers and refugees.

We are supporting the Citizens for Sanctuary Pledge, a campaign to secure justice for people fleeing persecution and rebuild public support for sanctuary. This has been endorsed by the Chief Rabbi, in addition to a number of other faith communities and leaders.

We note with concern the increased detention of asylum seekers. We believe that detention of asylum seekers should be a last resort; it is a practice that has a lasting negative impact on asylum seekers. Yet the use of detention has become more commonplace. 470 children were detained in the first six months of 2009 and this figure is only likely to increase further as the government is currently working to expand the size of the detention estate by 60% by 2012. Furthermore, in allowing for detainees to be held for an indefinite period of time, the UK derogates from European immigration legislation. Consequently asylum seekers in this country are afforded far fewer protections than in the majority of European states. By comparison, asylum seekers cannot be detained for longer than a month in France.

Prospective parliamentary candidates in the 2010 General Election should campaign responsibly, positively and sensitively on race and asylum issues and never seek to gain electoral advantage by pandering to fears about people seeking sanctuary. People fleeing persecution should be able to find sanctuary in safe countries like the UK and the long term future of sanctuary must be safeguarded.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to endorse the Citizens for Sanctuary pledge which states that:

- The UK should have a fair and effective decision-making body that takes pride in giving sanctuary to those who need it and denies it to those who do not.
- People seeking sanctuary should be treated fairly and humanely, have access to essential support and public services, and should make a contribution to the UK if they are able.
- Once a decision has been made, the UK should act swiftly, effectively and in a controlled way – either to assist integration or to effect a swift, safe and sustainable return for those who have had a fair hearing and have been refused sanctuary.
- Support policies that will end the detention of children and families for immigration reasons.

Tens of thousands of refused asylum seekers are currently living in destitution in the UK. As soon as their claim is deemed to have failed, the government cuts off all support. As a result they have nowhere to live and no money for food or clothing or any of the basic necessities of life. This can go on for months or years.

Until 2003, refused asylum seekers from unsafe and unstable countries (such as Congo, Darfur or Somalia) qualified for Exception Leave to Remain (ELR) and continued to receive subsistence-level support and accommodation (in 2002 this applied to one in four initial asylum decisions). But since ELR has gradually been phased out over the last five years, so that those who would once have been eligible to stay now find themselves without protection - and with all support withdrawn.

With no state support, refused asylum seekers become homeless and destitute, depending on others for the basic necessities of life. These include shelter, food, clothing and toiletries. They move from place to place; they are not allowed to work; their children cannot go to school. They become non-people.

Refugee charities, community organisations, churches, mosques and synagogues have been providing a patchwork of practical support, from cooked meals to counselling, much of it run and funded by volunteers.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to:

- Support the right of failed asylum seekers to be able to work in order to support themselves and their families, rather than depending on handouts.
- Give failed asylum seekers full access to health care and education while they remain in the UK.
- Support an amnesty for those for who have no realistic prospect of being returned to their home countries.

7. Volunteering

The Jewish community has a strong culture of volunteering. Many communal organisations are run with the support of huge volunteer bases.

The culture of volunteering is instilled in members of the Jewish community from a young age – many of the community's youth organisations are peer led and run by young people.

The voluntary sector would hugely benefit from greater support and commitment, including the provision of more resources and finances. This could raise the profile of volunteers and volunteering within the faith voluntary sector.

The Jewish Social Action Forum calls on any future government to:

- Recognise the importance of, and engage with the voluntary sector.
- Strategically consider how to engage the sector without marginalising or patronising the sector.
- Establish a clear strategy for funding to clarify who receives the funds and the rationale for choosing partners.
- Make volunteering easier by removing some of the red tape and compliance challenges currently involved. Criminal Record Bureau checks should not take weeks to process and it should be easier to obtain insurance for younger people to volunteer.