

# **The Scottish Inter Faith Council**

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Mr. Frank McAveety MSP  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

18<sup>th</sup> July 2008

Dear Mr. McAveety MSP,

## **WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM THE SCOTTISH INTER FAITH COUNCIL**

### **The Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee**

#### **Petition PE118 – Calling on MSPs to ban the slaughter methods of Dhabiha and Shechitah**

The Scottish Inter Faith Council (SIFC) welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to The Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee regarding Petition PE118 calling for MSPs to ban the slaughter methods of Dhabiha and Shechitah.

SIFC is a body which aims to advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Scotland, including awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground, and to promote good relations between persons of different religious faiths. The work of the Council seeks to break down barriers of fear and prejudice with bonds of friendship and respect amongst Scotland's diverse communities in order to build an inclusive Scotland for all.

SIFC offers a religiously neutral forum where representatives of faith communities can meet on a basis of equality and engage in dialogue and conversation about matters of religious and civic importance. It also attempts to facilitate dialogue between the Scottish Government and faith communities on a variety of issues. The Council's aim is to create opportunities for faith communities to speak for themselves in this dialogue rather than claiming to speak on their behalf.

The following major faith communities are represented on the Council:-

Baha'i  
Buddhist  
Christian  
Hindu  
Jewish  
Muslim  
Sikh

Web: <http://www.interfaithscotland.org>

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SIFC consulted with Jewish and Muslim member of the Council and would like to respond to the Public Petitions Committee's request for evidence with the following:

### **Background Information**

Judaism has a number of dietary laws. Food that has been prepared in an acceptable way is known as 'Kosher'. For meat to be considered kosher it must have been prepared correctly, normally under rabbinical supervision. Some meat such as pork and rabbit will not be considered kosher. Meat and dairy products should not be taken at the same meal and fish without scales or fins are also non-kosher.

Muslims differentiate between foods which are allowed (halal) and food which is forbidden (haram). Pork, any other part of the pig, carnivorous animals or blood is haram. Meat must also be slaughtered according to biblical rites by a Muslim butcher. The consumption of intoxicants is also forbidden.

### **Methods of slaughter by Dhabihah and Shechitah**

SIFC supports the written evidence submitted by the Muslim Council for Scotland and Scottish Council of Jewish Communities. These submissions both highlight the methods of slaughter used during the Dhabihah and Shechitah process.

### **Human Rights**

Article 9 of the Human Rights Act provides people of all faiths the right to observe their religion and to believe in the worship, teaching, practice and observance of the requirements of that respective religion. If Elected Members of the Scottish Parliament were to support a ban on Dhabihah and Shechitah, which are both religious requirements, questions regarding the Elected Member's commitment to upholding all legislative articles within the Human Rights Act would have to be raised.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is acknowledged internationally as a code of good practice. Article 18 of the declaration states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to manifest his/her religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. If MSPs were to legislate against Dhabihah and Shechitah, this act would clearly defy the declaration on the basis that members of the particular faith communities could not manifest their religion or belief through practice and observance.

## **Government and Animal Welfare Organisations Views**

In 2003, the Farm and Animal Welfare Council produced a report advising the UK Government on the welfare of animals at slaughter. In reply to that report, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) stated:

“The Government is committed to respect for the rights of religious groups and accepts that an insistence on a post-cut stun would not be compatible with the requirements of religious slaughter by Muslim and Jewish groups.”

The comments by DEFRA were welcomed by many organisations and affirmed the Government's stance to protect the rights of religious communities and groups.

On the 4 January 2008 Richard Lochhead MSP, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Environment, responded to a question (S3W-8024) placed by Cathy Jamieson MSP with the following:

“Although the slaughter of animals without pre-stunning does not take place in Scotland, it would be perfectly legal for this method to be used in Scottish slaughterhouses. The slaughter of sheep without pre-stunning for religious reasons is legal throughout the EU and to ban the export of sheep would contravene free trade rules and would be illegal under EU law.”

This statement by Richard Lochhead MSP was encouraging and has been viewed as the Scottish Government taking steps towards supporting the rights for members of faith communities and groups throughout Scotland to use the Dhabihah and Shechitah process. Any action by the Scottish Government to protect the rights of religious communities would be strongly supported by SIFC and faith communities and groups throughout Scotland.

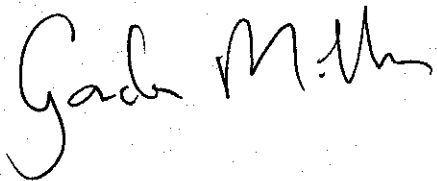
## **Conclusion**

The Scottish Inter Faith Council recommends to the members of the Public Petitions Committee that they reject this petition. The Jewish and Muslim religious laws require that all animals be treated with dignity and respect and throughout the slaughter process the animal suffers minimal pain and distress. SIFC understands that the committee members have received information about the process of Dhabihah and Shechitah and MSPs will acknowledge that these acts are concluded in a compassionate way.

As the Jewish and Muslim communities rely on the process of Dhabihah and Shechitah in order to eat any meat, a legislative ban on these methods would not only isolate the communities from a dietary requirement but would also send a wave of concern throughout all faith communities, disregard Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and indeed breach article 9 of the Human Rights Act.

If you wish to discuss our requests any further, or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. My contact details are contained within the above letter head.

With warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gordon Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G'.

Gordon Miller  
Parliamentary and Equalities Officer  
Scottish Inter Faith Council