

Robertson apologises after meeting with Israeli diplomat

Angus Robertson the Central Edinburgh MP and Minister for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, remained under fire today after a recent meeting with the deputy Israeli Ambassador.

Following the meeting two weeks ago – the details were kept out of the media until afterwards due to security concerns – the ambassador, Daniela Grudsky published a photo posing with the Scottish minister. The ambassador said that topics discussed at the meeting included “unique commonalities” between Scotland and Israel and “cooperating in the fields of technology, culture and renewable energy”.

Last week the First Minister defended Mr Robertson attending the meeting saying it was “necessary to outline our long-standing position on an immediate ceasefire directly, and explicitly, to one of Israel’s representatives in the UK”.

“The Scottish Government received the meeting request and accepted on the basis it would provide an opportunity to convey our consistent position on the killing and suffering of innocent civilians in the region”.

Apology

But today the Cabinet Secretary has issued an apology, and confirms there will be no future meetings until Israel makes

progress towards peace in Gaza.



Angus Robertson Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

Angus Robertson said: “Two weeks ago, I met the new Israeli UK Deputy Ambassador at their request.

“We anticipated the Deputy Ambassador would raise concerns about antisemitism, as well as other issues.

“It was rightly for me to decide whether to take the meeting, however, as is normal practice, the First Minister was made aware before the meeting happened.

“My view was that given the Israeli UK Deputy Ambassador had requested a meeting it was an opportunity to express the Scottish Government’s clear and unwavering position on the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and I did exactly that.

“No one intended that this meeting be presented as legitimising the actions of the Israeli government in Gaza.

The Scottish Government has been consistent in our unequivocal condemnation of the atrocities we have witnessed in Gaza.

“The reality, however, is that this meeting has been taken by many to represent a normalisation of relations between the Israeli and Scottish Governments.

“As such, it is clear that it would have been better to ensure that the meeting was strictly limited to the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an end to the appalling loss of life in the region. I apologise for the fact that this did not happen.

“Going forward, it is clear that, having now spoken direct to the Israeli Government and making them aware of our position on an immediate ceasefire, it would not be appropriate to accept any invitation for a further meeting.

“This will remain our position until such time as real progress has been made towards peace, unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance is provided and Israel cooperates fully with its international obligations on the investigation of genocide and war crimes.

“The Scottish Government does not support any normalisation of its relations with the Israeli Government during this period.

“The Scottish Government will never hold back in expressing support for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages, an end to UK arms being sent to Israel, and the recognition of a sovereign Palestinian state within a two-state solution.”

Criticism

There are calls for Mr Robertson’s resignation even in light of the apology. The former MP Joanna Cherry, KC, has tweeted that Mr Robertson holds a “very protected position” within the SNP and will not be sacked or asked to resign.

Brendan O'Hara MP wrote a letter to Mr Robertson according to Holyrood.com in which he "condemns the talks". He claims that the Cabinet Secretary has undermined months of talks and hard work in demanding that the UK government called for a ceasefire. Initial moves by the SNP to move that position earlier in the year were eventually supported by a small number of Labour MPs. Mr O'Hara is said to have written: "I fear all of that has been undone by the decision of The Scottish Government to meet with the deputy Israeli ambassador, and thereby normalise relations with a government whose actions could never be described as 'normal'."

An emergency motion in relation to the matter has been tabled for the SNP conference which will take place at the end of the month.

John Mason MSP has lost the party whip over separate comments he made about his own meeting with the Israeli deputy ambassador.