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Jim McHarg
Most Worthy Grand Master
Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland
13 Olympia Street
Bridgeton
Glasgow G40 3TA

15 April 2020

Dear Grand Master – Jim,

I was deeply saddened to hear about the passing of three members of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland due to Covid19. I would like to pass on my deepest condolences to the families, friends and members of the Orange Lodge who knew these individuals and will be suffering at this very difficult time.

I know that you, your executive team and Lodge members themselves will be working hard to support all of your members who are vulnerable and need the care and kindness of a supportive community. Indeed, I was impressed to hear that the Pride of Whifflet Lodge had organised hampers for Monklands Hospital and the Ambulance Service, and that their District Lodge had built on this idea by raising around £2,000 to donate goods and toiletries to patients in Monklands Hospital who are currently unable to receive visitors.

I would like to thank you for all of the work that the Orange Lodge is taking forward to provide that support, and for cancelling your marches in the immediate future. As you are aware, the strain on public resources at this time of crisis is immense and acts of good citizenship like this are greatly appreciated.

I sincerely hope that we will pass through this period of adversity soon so that we can rebuild our lives and communities having played our part in overcoming the worst emergency we have experienced in the 21st century.

HUMZA YOUSAF

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire
Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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15 May 2020

Dear Grand Master

Further to my letter of 15 April, the attack which took place on the Orange Hall in Springburn on 10 May has come to my attention and I wanted to contact you to express my deep concern about this and other incidents which I understand have taken place in relation to your organisation's venues.

I am absolutely clear that such acts of vandalism have no place in Scotland and are completely unacceptable. Those involved must be held to account for their actions through our judicial process and I understand Police Scotland is engaged and investigating the incident. I hope that the damage to the hall, and any other venues that have been targeted, has been minimal and that it will not stop you and members of the Orange Order from continuing to use it following lockdown restrictions.

Scotland is a diverse multi-faith society where everyone has the right to practice their faith peacefully. I fully recognise that the Protestant community continues to contribute to Scottish community life and am well aware that your venues are hugely important for the wellbeing of the people they serve.

Our places of worship, community halls and sporting venues all allow us to come together through common beliefs and interests and provide the foundation for the strong social bonds that give our communities the resilience we need to face the hard times like the current Covid-19 crisis. Indeed, I am aware that the Orange Order have been making a valuable contribution to our efforts to tackle the current crisis and I am extremely grateful for all of your efforts. By working together we can get through this crisis and start to return to normal, even if it takes some time.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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I know that you are in regular dialogue with my officials and encourage you to keep them informed about any further incidents that take place. Please pass on my best wishes to your officials and members during this difficult time.



HUMZA YOUSAF

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RECORD OF MEETING	
Issue:	Protests and demonstrations
Date:	Friday 19 June 2020
Time:	16:30
Venue:	Phone conversation
Participants:	Humza Yousaf, Cabinet Secretary for Justice
	Jim McHarg, Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland
	[Redacted], Special Adviser
	[Redacted], Scottish Government

Key issues raised/discussed

1. The Cabinet Secretary expressed his disappointment that the Grand Master had spoken to the media in advance of the phone call, and that he did not accept criticism, attributed to the Grand Master in relation to a press enquiry the Government had received, that the Scottish Government was 'crushing Protestant protests' at George Square for political reasons.

Protests/demonstrations

2. The Grand Master set out a clear view that all demonstrations should be banned at this time in light of the fact that we were still in the midst of a pandemic. The Cabinet Secretary explained that all such gatherings were unlawful and that current regulations prohibited them.

3. It was also noted that implementation of the law was a matter for Police Scotland which, acting on intelligence available to them, needed to police events in an appropriate and proportionate manner. This often included police gathering evidence of criminality which would be acted on after the event. This has been the case since regulations came into force on 27 March 2020.

4. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that he and others had clearly called for members of the public not to attend these events and to consider alternative ways to express their demands. This included the first Black Lives Matter event on 6 June 2020.

Vandalism of statues and monuments

5. The Grand Master expressed his concern that Scottish Government politicians had not strongly criticised the vandalism of statues and monuments which had been an outcome of some recent gatherings of those demonstrating against racism. The Cabinet Secretary was clear that all acts of vandalism are criminal and that it is for police to respond to these. However, he was concerned that arguments around statues were distracting from the core focus of tackling institutional and overt racism.

Criticism of those attending gatherings

6. The Grand Master set out his view that Scottish Government criticism of those involved in the George Square gatherings had been one-sided, focussing on those who had gathered for the purpose of protecting statues. The Cabinet Secretary explained that the focus of his criticism had been on the behaviours of individuals involved. Therefore his key criticism were aimed at those who had used the gatherings to express racist and other offensive views.

7. The Cabinet Secretary noted that he had not seen any evidence that those involved in the protection of statues had been members of the Orange Order, but the evidence had indicated that this group included individuals who claimed some affiliation to Loyalism as well as those involved in far-right politics and high risk football supporters. The Cabinet Secretary invited the Grand Master to similarly criticise such behaviour which was racist, unlawful and discredited those participating. This invitation was not accepted. The Grand Master told the Cabinet Secretary that he had not seen any evidence of racism during the disorder that had taken place that week.

Glasgow City Council

8. The Grand Master highlighted concerns over the lack of engagement between the political leadership of Glasgow City Council and the Loyal Orders. The Cabinet Secretary noted this concern and offered to raise this with the Leader of the council.

Close

9. In conclusion it was agreed that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Grand Master had strongly differing views on recent events.

Scottish Government
19 June 2020