Clergy Discipline Measure 2003

In the Clergy Discipline Tribunal – Diocese of Winchester

Re the Reverend Dr Stephen Robert Sizer

WITNESS STATEMENT OF

PROFESSOR PETER TIMOTHY ('TIM') HOLT UNWIN

I, **PETER TIMOTHY ('TIM') HOLT UNWIN**, of 1 Hawthorn Cottages, Wellington Avenue, Virginia Water GU25 4HU **WILL SAY** as follows:

1. I make this statement on behalf of the Reverend Dr Stephen Sizer ("**Stephen**") in support of his Answer to a Complaint made against him by the Board of Deputies of British Jews ("**the Board of Deputies**").

Biography

2. I am an academic geographer with particular and long-standing interests in digital technologies, Middle Eastern cultures and histories, international development and philosophy. I am founding Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D [Information and Communication Technologies for Development], Emeritus Professor of Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London, and an Honorary Professor at Lanzhou University in China.

3. Since 1980, I have written or edited 15 books and more than 200 academic papers and chapters, many of which focus on the use of digital technologies in development practices.

How I know Stephen

4. I have known Stephen since 1997 when he became vicar at Christ Church, Virginia Water and we have kept in touch since then. I am therefore well-placed not only to comment on Stephen as a pastor and friend, but, in view of my interests in Middle Eastern affairs and digital technologies, also on the context of the wider case being made against him

5. Throughout his time at Virginia Water, he regularly encouraged the congregation to be accepting of "difference", be it ethnic, racial or religious, and I particularly recall his openness and willingness to engage humbly and reflectively on these issues with a wide variety of people.

6. Stephen is a loving and caring person who remains faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. He cares deeply for Jewish people, and while being critical of some actions of the State of Israel and extreme Zionists, he is most definitely not a racist or an anti-Semite.

Is the Board of Deputies representative of British Jews?

7. In my understanding, there are diverse views within the global Jewish community, and more specifically within the British Jewish Community (and indeed other diaspora Jewish groups), and I have always therefore found it strange that the Board of Deputies can claim to represent *all* British Jews. It is rather akin to the House of Bishops claiming that they represent all British Christians. More substantively, though, there are numerous surveys of the view of Jews in Britain on varying issues that indicate their diversity of opinions, as for example so clearly shown in the JPR Report in 2010 on the attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel.

8. The Board of Deputies also does not seem to appreciate and fully understand the practices used in social media in encouraging debate. The point must be reiterated that simply reposting something on social media does not mean that one agrees with it. This practice is widely used to encourage debate. I frequently, for example, repost material with which I disagree, so as to encourage others to discuss it and help me understand better the issues raised. This is especially so when a "?" is used, encouraging others to question the matter posted.

Anti-Semitism

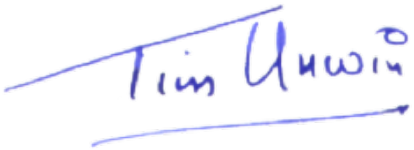
9. There remains a clear dichotomy of views as to what Anti-Semitism truly is. These arise in part because of lack of clarity between the actual IHRA statement and the examples

given. Many people have pointed out that the IHRA definition is very problematic, in part because it focuses explicitly on "Jews", but does not specify what is meant by "*Jewish community institutions*". The IHRA definition specifically states that "*criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic*". Yet, the IHRA illustrations also claim that "*manifestations include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity*". This confusion, which appears to be deliberate. lies at the heart of many of the debates around the meaning of anti- Semitism.

10. My own view on this is quite clear: criticism of the state of Israel cannot be a form of anti-Semitism, but criticism of Jews, either as individuals or a racial/ethnic group is. Likewise, criticism of the British government is not racist, but criticism of British people as a collective entity is. Stephen is not anti- semitic or racist therefore in the comments he has made about the Israeli government, in the same way that I am not racist in my criticism of the British government. The Board of Deputies of British Jews seems therefore to be being disingenuous in claiming that Stephen is being racist. As Stephen rightly points out there are categorical differences between anti-Semitism, criticism of Zionism and criticism of the State of Israel.

Statement of truth

11. I believe the facts and matters in this statement to be true



TIM UNWIN

Date: 16th October 2020