

Cross Party Group on Cuba
28th September 2011
Q1.03

1. Elaine Smith MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that Jan Pietrasik would be moved further up the agenda in order to let her leave to attend another meeting.

2. ATTENDEES

Elaine Smith MSP
Neil Findlay MSP
Drew Smith MSP
Hugh Henry MSP
Margaret McGregor
Lesley Dobbin
Ian Parsons
Kath Campbell
Jan Pietrasik
Stuart Hyslop
Ronnie Moran
Michael Sharpe
Tommy Kane
Scott Lamond MSYP
Rachel Murphy

3. APOLOGIES

Sandra White MSP
Murdo Fraser MSP
Ann Henderson,
Freida Park,
Dougie Kerr,
Sean Lafferty,
Neil Anderson,
Arthur West,
Liz Elkind
Pauline Boyle
Gerry Corbet

4. (i) Minutes of the last meeting (16th June 2011) moved as a correct record by Drew Smith MSP and seconded by Neil Findlay MSP

(ii) **Matters Arising**

Tommy Kane commented that the group write to BGIPU requesting that the Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament be included in an official delegation to Cuba alongside the members of the Westminster Group on Cuba. However, a disappointing response had been received saying that this was not possible.

Elaine Smith MSP said that previous representations had received a similar response stating that The Scottish parliament wouldn't be included because it was not a sovereign parliament.

Ronnie Moran asked if there was any progress in a possible visit from the new Cuban Ambassador.

Kath Campbell confirmed that requests had not been responded to and that the appointment of the new Political Councillor is maybe causing delays. Contact would be made with CSC in London to progress this issue. **Neil Findlay MSP** suggested making contact with the Convenor of the Westminster Group to try and progress the issue.

(iii) **Elaine Smith MSP** confirmed that the Bar in the Scottish Parliament was indeed Cuba friendly.

(iv) **Festival of Politics Elaine Smith MSP** commented on the success of the previous event and advised that funding would be required, perhaps by Unions. It was agreed that further consideration could be given when the parliament asks for suggestions.

5. **Jan Pietrasik – Organising committee on Joint Cuba/UK Art Exhibition**

Jan gave a presentation on the forthcoming exhibition which opens in London in spring 2012. The Lighthouse, Glasgow has been secured to show the exhibition on 7th – 13th May. Support has been welcomed from Cuba Solidarity, Visual Arts Council in Cuba, the Cuban Ministry of Culture and Glasgow City Council. It was noted that this exhibition will be a first for Scotland and especially important as Glasgow is twinned with Havana and sits well with Scotland's vibrant art & culture scene. The exhibition which aims to showcase Cuban Art includes artwork from famous Cuban artists and from the Miami Five prisoners. Monies raised will go towards the Miami Five campaign. Two members of Miami Five families will be available for speaking. A discussion then took place on how the group/MSP's could support the event. **Tommy Kane** will organise MSP's being set up as patrons and it was agreed that assistance would be

afforded as appropriate with regard to fundraising and promotion.

It was agreed that other opportunities, such as engaging with businesses, should be co-ordinated around the exhibition to maximise the potential. **Kath Campbell** advised that visiting relatives of Miami Five would need sponsorship. It was also suggested that a Parliamentary Reception be pursued. **Elaine Smith MSP** suggested that the organising committee write to the Scottish Parliament to see if it would consider hosting the exhibition in the Parliament or alternatively an MSP may wish to host it. **Drew Smith MSP** offered assistance in speaking with Glasgow City Council with regard to any additional funding that could be offered and agreed to join the organising committee at a later date. **Jan Pietrasik** will advise the best time for MSP's to become more involved. **Elaine Smith MSP** suggested that Jan or the group engage with Universities and companies already doing work/research with Cuba. **Tommy Kane** and **Drew Smith MSP** suggested approaching the Minister for Culture and Liz Lochhead to appraise them of the project. Elaine Smith MSP thanked Jan for coming to update the group on the exhibition.

6. **Developing closer links with the Cuban Embassy/
Parliament**

Elaine Smith MSP and **Kath Campbell** expressed their disappointment in learning that Cuba is having a "Scotland" week and that it had been organised without any consultation with SCSC or the CPG. Glasgow City Council has arranged for Brian Wilson to be a representative. **Elaine Smith MSP** undertook to urgently write to the Cuban Embassy for information and noted that the Scottish Parliament is invited to other "Scotland" weeks such as in Canada and America. **Drew Smith MSP** agreed to lodge parliamentary questions regarding information on invitations etc to the Parliament.

Kath Campbell stated that the Cuban Ambassador's first visit to Scotland would be to attend the SNP conference, however, as this was during recess then it couldn't coincide with a CPG meeting. **Elaine Smith MSP** stated that she would again write to the Cuban Embassy as it was important to have Cuban visitors to the group.

7. **Scottish Honorary Consul**

Elaine Smith MSP advised the group on the possibilities of have an honorary Scottish Consul for Cuba. It is up to the Embassy to appoint a Consu. It was agreed that the MSP's would meet for a further briefing on this which would be set up by **Margaret McGregor**

8. **Miami Five Vigil at US Consulate**

Kath Campbell requested that MSP's consider joining SCSC to hand in a letter to the US consulate on 1st December to keep up the pressure to free the Miami Five.

9. **A.O.B.**

Information had been received from Steve Wilkinson, Lecturer at London Metropolitan University regarding the fact that Cuban courses had been cut and he was being made redundant. **Kath Campbell** suggested that a letter be sent from the CPG stating concern and asking if the decision can be re-considered.

Ian Parsons informed the group on the charity, Cuba Conservation Trust, he set up to assist with restoring historic buildings in Cuba and improving relations with Cuba which is done with sponsorship from commercial companies. **Elaine Smith MSP** suggested a motion be lodged following further discussions from Ian Parsons.

Michael Sharpe asked if the CPG had any plans for the 50th anniversary of the blockade in February 2012. The possibility of Member Business on Cuba was discussed.

10. **Date for Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be arranged when confirmation of a visit from the Ambassador was received or another suitable speaker was identified.

Elaine Smith MSP closed the meeting and thanked everyone for coming.