

CROSS PARTY GROUP: INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

16 JUNE 2015

COMMITTEE ROOM 5, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

5.30PM – 7PM

Attendees: Sarah Boyack MSP, Kate Fry, Irene Mosota, Jonathan Ssentamu, Benedict Haldane, David Stevenson, Otis Orteseh, Neil Findlay MSP, Anne McTaggart MSP, Colin Pritchett, Anthony Olowoyeye, Margaret McDougall MSP, Linda Todd, Bob Kerr, Aaron Rhys Doidge, Ferdi Katsriku, Pat Hiddleston, Bryony Nicholson, David Kenvyn, Mark Beacon, Alexandra Edgar and Amy Ritchie.

Apologies: Mario Aguilar, Callum Henderson, Hamish Goldie-Scot, Elaine Smith MSP, Matthew Crichton, Richard Simpson MSP, Johann Lamont MSP, James MacLean, Patrick Harvie MSP, Hanzala Malik MSP, Siobhan McMahon MSP, Linda Fabiani MSP, Andrew Marin, Jeni MacKay, John Mason MSP.

Welcome and Introduction

Sarah Boyack MSP opened the Annual General Meeting of the Cross-Party Group on International Development and thanked everyone for coming. She then ran through the agenda – first would be the AGM items followed by a talk and discussion on the denial of democracy and human rights in Swaziland.

Annual General Meeting - Business

Appointment of Office Bearers

Margaret McDougall MSP took chair of the meeting.

Anne McTaggart MSP nominated Sarah Boyack MSP for the role of convenor. This was seconded by Neil Findlay MSP. Sarah was elected unopposed.

Sarah Boyack MSP nominated Patrick Harvie MSP (in his absence, but with his approval) for the role of deputy convenor. This was seconded by Anne McTaggart MSP. Patrick was elected unopposed.

Anne McTaggart MSP nominated Siobhan McMahon (in her absence, but with her approval) for the role of treasurer. This was seconded by Sarah Boyack MSP. Siobhan was elected unopposed.

There is no current secretariat as this role is currently covered by Sarah's office but anyone interested in this role was asked to speak to Sarah after meeting.

Chair was then handed back to Sarah

Annual Report and Minutes

Copies of the draft Annual Report were distributed at the meeting. It did not need to be approved during the meeting, but Sarah wanted members to have the first sight of it.

There was an additional special meeting last year on the Ebola crisis. The proposals agreed were taken to the Scottish Government which led to a statement in Parliament which shows the importance of the group.

There are four proposed meetings for next year and the group needs suggestions for topics for discussion. The group will only exist after the election in May 2016 if the new MSPs decide to continue it.

Suggestions for discussion topics next year included Sustainable Development Goals, the climate talks in Paris in December, migrants fleeing to Europe, the mapping strategy for International Development, corruption across Africa, the African diaspora playing a bigger role in International Development, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association looking at government procedures and the Magna Carta and the rights of individual.

Sarah asked members to review the draft minutes of the 20 January 2015 meeting, which were emailed in advance of the AGM. Bryony Nicholson moved that they were an accurate record of the meeting, and Irene Mosota seconded and the minutes were passed.

Financial Report

Sarah provided an up to date bank balance of £555.20 (as of 10 Feb 2015). Sarah advised that the remaining balance in the account is used for catering purposes at meetings and there would be no subscriptions to the Group for the 2014/15 period.

Presentation by Vincent Ncongwane, Secretary General of the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland

Sarah introduced Vincent and thanked Unison for bringing him along. Swaziland is the only absolute monarchy in Africa and Trade Unions are restricted. The 1973 state of emergency is still in place, yet most of us don't know much about the nation.

Vincent also thanked Unison and ACTSA for their help in organising this. He described Swaziland as even less democratic than Zimbabwe (they at least have elections) yet less known. Political parties were banned in 1973 and the King issued a decree to claim all power. Most parliamentarians are appointed by the King so the governance cannot be changed from the inside.

He believes it is only through labour organisations that the people can voice political concerns so the government banned them. The ban was lifted on 25th May 2015 and only because of the International Labour Conference held in June, to keep up appearances. Police interfere whenever there is a Union meeting. Vincent gave examples of police brutality and them stopping every attempt at a meeting.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has called for Swaziland to release political prisoners who criticised governmental decisions but there has only been silence from African governments.

Vincent called on EU and the CPG to put pressure on the Swazi government. He did not feel total economic sanctions were the way forward but suggested pressure to respect human rights or risk losing the EU markets. He also called on Scottish Government to work with Commonwealth organisations so that this cannot be accepted anymore.

He explained that people in Swaziland want to do more to change things themselves but alone they cannot change the system and need assistance.

Sarah thanked Vincent for his very informative and interesting presentation and said she agreed on Commonwealth principle.

Question and Answer session

A range of questions were asked following the presentation. Please note that it is not the intention of the minutes to record a verbatim account.

Sarah Boyack (SB) asked what the links are like with Unions in other countries.

Vincent Ncongwane (VN) explained that the links are close and it was pressure from Union centres around the world that made the Swaziland Government acknowledge TUCSWA

Ferdi Katsriku suggested events like the EU Summit and other international meetings could be used as way to get their voice heard.

Anne McTaggart asked what women's representation is like.

VN explained that women's representation is a big issue and that only one woman was elected in 2013. There are also a number of cultural issues involved and he gave some examples that showed how hard it is for women to be engaged when they are challenged just by leaving the house. ACTSA and others are trying to help women get the confidence they need, and trying to change the culture that stops women being engaged.

Anthony Olowoyeye said there is a "code of silence" among African leaders who won't speak against each other. He then asked what the level of poverty and life opportunities are like.

Otis Orteseh asked why the African Union and Amnesty don't take more notice of what is going on in Swaziland.

VN said that Amnesty do take an interest. Poverty rates are 70% and much of the budget goes to army. The army cannot fight other countries and are used to suppress the people. Two thirds of the population are living on food aid yet the government have now built new (un-needed) airport.

SB said that the IMF had raised the issue of Swaziland sovereign spending and security, instead of social spending.

David Kenvyn (DK) circulated a petition to call for the release of political leaders, activists and journalists who have been arrested without trial.

Pat Hiddleston had worked in Swaziland Ministry of Education and said politics was never discussed, probably for fear of losing jobs.

VN explained that no criticism is allowed of the King.

Mark Beacon (MB) said those living in rural areas don't think about the constitution. There is stronger cultural history there where women are subservient with no rights, and there is no legislation nationally to stop marital violence, for example. The Rural Women's Society are trying to empower women throughout the country, and are funded through the National Lottery.

Jonathan Ssentamu suggested they follow the example of Uganda where the people empowered themselves.

Colin Pritchett asked if there are many Swazis who work outwith Swaziland, for example in South Africa.

VN said that there are but even they don't want to be associated with those fighting for democracy as it could negatively influence any family still in Swaziland.

Ben Haldane lived in Namibia and they had a big Union movement. He suggested Unions in other African countries could apply pressure more easily than leaders of other countries.

SB asked for suggestions of what lobbying could be done following tonight's meeting.

DK said there was additional information on the ACTSA website including the petition he mentioned.

SB suggested people also write to their MEPs as Europe seems to have influential power in Swaziland. She also suggested that she and Anne McTaggart MSP will raise this with the Scottish Parliamentary Commonwealth Association.

MB said that Swaziland is breaching the Commonwealth regulations at all levels but the Commonwealth is doing little to stop it despite having the power to take disciplinary action including suspension. Britain could also use its power as Swaziland is a former colony.

SB closed the meeting saying it was a privilege that Vincent came and encouraged everyone at the meeting to take action on this issue.

Forthcoming meetings of the CPG:

All meetings are held in the Scottish Parliament and commence at 5.30pm until 7pm.

15th September 2015

17th November 2015

19th January 2016

15th March 2016