

Minutes Cross Party Group On the Middle East and South Asia

12.30pm 8th October 2014, Room Q1.03, Scottish Parliament

MSPs Present:

Hanzala Malik MSP (Convener)
Jamie McGrigor MSP
Anne McTaggart MSP
Lewis MacDonald MSP
Malcom Chisholm MSP
Bob Doris MSP

All Others Present:

Umbreen Khalid - (Secretary)
Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman – Kurdistan Regional Government High Representative
Khasro Agayi - Kurdistan Regional Government
Thomas Lea – Alwaleed Centre, University of Edinburgh
Faten Hameed – Scottish Iraqi Society
Bob Haddow – UK Filter
Goran Zangana - Individual
Mohammed Razaq – West of Scotland Regional Equality Council
April Cumming – Individual
Jack Feinmann – Individual
Mr and Dr Saadi – Individuals
Eddie Holmes - Individual

Apologies:

Michael McMahon MSP
Dr Crispin Bates – Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh
Dr Patricia Jeffreery - University of Edinburgh

1. Matter arising from previous minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting on 2nd April 2014 were approved with no amendments.

Matter arising from the previous minutes were:

- Proposed friendship visit to Pakistan. The expected changes to the Pakistani High Commissioner in London and the Consul in Glasgow have delayed progress. In addition, Peter Upton, the Director of the British Council in Pakistan, who was initially enthusiastic about supporting a visit from Parliamentarians, but has not provided any follow up.

2. Presentation and Q &A on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and ISIS

Ms Rahman gave some background on the situation in the region. The discussion was wide ranging but the main points raised were given below.

Refugees – The UNHCR estimates that there are approximately 1.4 million refugees and internally displaced people in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As the region has an estimated population of 5 million, managing the crisis puts a huge strain on financial and human resources. Financial aid is important but Ms Rahman highlighted that they also need strategic support in terms of management and skills of running refugee centres, organising projects and rehabilitation of mentally and physically wounded people. She gave an example of a group of Kurdish ex-patriot doctors who had set up a bakery in a refugee camp near Erbil. The bakery was not only providing food for significant numbers of people but was also a source of employment and transferable skills.

Yazidi Kurds and abuse of women and girls – the Yazidis are a Kurdish community who practice an ancient syncretic religion linked to Zoroastrianism. As such they are seen as heretics or even ‘devil worshippers’ by the so-called Islamic State (IS). Following forced conversions to Islam or face death, in August around 50,000 Yazidis fled to, and were trapped on Mount Sinjar surrounded by ISIS troops. US bombing have kept IS troops back but as the harsh winter approaches it is even more vital that this situation is resolved. There are also widespread reports of women and girls who have been abducted and sold into sexual slavery. As a result of this the representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government said that they would like to learn from organisations in Scotland with experience of supporting victims of sexual violence and the number of victims and sometimes girls as young as twelve was unprecedented.

3. This was followed by a film presentation by “Kurdistan is Supported by Scotland (KISS)” of ‘The first Movie’, a film shot in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq by Scottish writer/director Mark Cousins. The group is working towards sending a group of volunteer medical staff from Scotland to refugee camps in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

AOB

Action: Umbreen to circulate dates of next meeting and sub group meetings.