

**The Scottish Parliament
Cross Party Group on Cuba AGM
28th October 2020
Virtual meeting**

MINUTES

1. Welcome

Elaine Smith MSP welcomed everyone to the new form of virtual meeting, especially the Ambassador noting the group had hoped she could have attended in person, in normal circumstances.

Elaine advised that although it had been some time since the last CPG meeting she was pleased to have been able to take part in an online event earlier in the year to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Federation of Cuban Women, some of whom had addressed previous CPG meetings. Elaine also advised that during this meeting she was made aware of the Nobel Peace Prize campaign to nominate the Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade and advised the group of motions she had laid on both these of these issues and copies were added to the zoom chat. Elaine also advised she had started the Nobel nomination process.

Attendees

Elaine Smith MSP
Neil Findlay MSP
Bárbara Montalvo
Kath Campbell
Phil McGarry
Lesley Dobbin
Katrina Faccenda
Ann Henderson
Sean McLaughlan
Paul Harding
Lesley Dobbin
Matthew Creighton

Arthur West
Aaron Kelly
Pauline Bryan
Vince Mills
Pauline Boyle
Nestor Marin
Lilian Macer
Gordon Scobie
Tom McMahan
Jane Wood
James Robertson
Ian Parsons

Fergus Brown
Jimmy Keenan
Frieda Park
Antonio Aguila
John Campbell
Keith Stoddart
Charles Pound
Ian Drummond
James Whyte
Maeve Mackinnon

Apologies were given by;

Sandra White MSP Murdo Fraser MSP, Colin Beattie MSP, John Finnie MSP, Joan Cutting, Liz Elkind, Kath Bateman

2. Election of Office Bearers

The following Office Bearers were elected

Convener: **Elaine Smith MSP**

Nominated by Kath Campbell

Seconded by Pauline Boyle

Vice Convener: **Sandra White MSP**

Nominated by Elaine Smith MSP

Seconded by Kath Campbell

Vice Convener: **Neil Findlay MSP**

Nominated by Vince Mills

Seconded by Elaine Smith MSP

Secretary: **Kath Campbell**

Nominated by Pauline Bryan

Seconded by Jane Wood

3. Minutes of last meeting – (19th November 2019) and matter arising

Previous minutes were approved as a true record via email by Paul Harding and seconded by Liz Elkind prior to the zoom meeting.

Elaine Smith MSP referred to the briefing produced for the last meeting by Graham Smith former General Secretary of STUC and gained agreement by the group that the new General Secretary Roz Foyer is sent congratulations and an invitation to join the CPG.

Neil Findlay MSP noted that Graham's briefing was on behalf of Justice for Columbia and suggested that the next meeting include an update on the situation. It was also discussed that going forward in the next parliament that a new CPG on Latin America be considered.

4. Update from the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign on matters of interest in the region

Phil McGarry introduced himself as the RMT political officer and Chair of the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign. Phil gave a comprehensive report on the current political and social situation in Venezuela including information on the devastating effects of the 360 US imposed sanctions causing a humanitarian crisis, the failure of the Bank of England to release Venezuela gold deposits and concerns about the forthcoming election. Phil encouraged everyone to sign the [petition](#) against the sanctions on the VSC website and also commented on the excellent public health care and track & trace system which has seen much fewer Covid cases and deaths compared to the rest of the world. **Neil Findlay MSP** asked if any international observers were being invited as he had found the experience helpful and interesting in the past.

5. Update on Cuba Solidarity Campaign – Kath Campbell

Kath Campbell gave thanks to Elaine Smith MSP welcomed the Ambassador to her first meeting. Kath gave an update on the efforts of the Cuba Solidarity campaign expressing concern at the current difficulties such as the embargo causing medical aid and PPE being blocked. Kath also gave information on upcoming campaign events and drew attention to the [CSC website](#) showing information on the best way to assist. Kath also wished to record her thanks to Elaine and her staff for the years of work on the CPG on Cuba and also to Elaine for taking part in the Federation of Cuban Women event and for the motions and nomination for a Nobel Peace prize for the Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade.

Aaron Kelly advised that he had recently interviewed two International Brigade Medics and offered to send a link for distribution to the group.

6. Speaker: Ambassador Barbara Elena Montalvo Alvarez

Following an introduction by Elaine Smith MSP the Ambassador gave an excellent interesting update on the current situation in Cuba, gave thanks for the work undertaken by the CPG and conveyed her best wishes to Scotland to recover as soon as possible from the pandemic. The Ambassador advised the group of the tremendous efforts made to combat Covid-19 in Cuba, the relatively few numbers of deaths and 91% recovery rate made possible by the National Emergency Planning programme, early intervention, mass testing and hospitalisation of all those infected. The Ambassador also gave an update on the impact of the ongoing sanctions and the effects of the loss of tourism due to the pandemic.

The Ambassador took questions from the group and finished by thanking the CPG for the ongoing friendship and solidarity with Cuba.

7. A.O.C.B. & Date of next meeting

Elaine Smith MSP advised she would try and arrange a final meeting before dissolution, even if it has to be virtual and details would be sent in due course. Elaine advised the Group that she, Neil Findlay MSP and Sandra White MSP were all standing down at the election but hoped the CPG would be taken forward by new MSPs.

Elaine closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.