

## CROSS PARTY GROUP: INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

12 September 2017

COMMITTEE ROOM 5, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

6PM – 8PM

*Please note that it is not the intention of the minutes to record a verbatim account.*

**Attendees:** Lewis Macdonald MSP, Patrick Harvie MSP, Ash Denham MSP, Joan McApline MSP

**Member Organisation list:** Ryan McQuigg (Oxfam Scotland), Lewis Ryder-Jones (Scotland's International Development Alliance), Sara Cowan (Oxfam), Selina Hales (Refuweegee), Alistair Seaman (International Nepal Fellowship), David Stevenson (University of Edinburgh), Jane Andrews (University of St Andrews), Christopher Stephenson (Plan Vivo Foundation), Charlie Bevan (Tearfund Scotland), Susan McIntosh (IDEAS),

**Individual list:** David Kenvyn, Benjamin Carey, Atishay Mathur, Dr Callum Henderson

**Apologies:** Kate Forbes MSP, Graham O'Neill (Scottish Refugee Council), James MacLean

**Welcome:** Lewis Macdonald MSP welcomed everyone stating that the meeting was also the Groups AGM. All MSP members were asked if they still wanted to remain as members no one stated they wanted to leave. Office bearers were voted in Lewis Macdonald MSP remains as Convener and Patrick Harvie remains as Deputy Convener. A noted change was that Lewis Ryder-Jones from Scotland's International Development Alliance will take over the Group's secretariat role from Ryan McQuigg from Oxfam.

Lewis Macdonald introduced the evenings topic which was agreed to be on the issue of refugees, Lewis also introduced two guest speakers, Sara Cowan from Oxfam and Selina Hales from Refuweegee

**Sara Cowan:** Sara opened her talk by stating that we are currently witnessing the greatest displacement crisis since World War II. Sara went on to outline some facts of the situation including that 65 million people have been forced to flee their home from conflict, violence and persecution. Of those forced to flee half are children, many travel alone or are separated from their families during their search for safety. An unprecedented 22.5million refugees in the world today, with over 40million people displaced in their own countries; 84% of refugees are in low or middle income countries. The world's six richest countries (US, China, Japan, Germany, UK, France) host less than 10% of refugees in the world. The UK hosts less than 1% of the worlds refugees.

Sara pointed out that this isn't about one crisis or one conflict. This is a worldwide emergency that demands an international response and a global solution, because no individual country can solve it alone. The international community must work together to find peaceful solutions to conflicts around the globe to bring warring parties round the negotiating table. Must also work together on solutions to causes of slower onset displacement such as climate change.

Sara went out to praise countries that have offered safety to refugees like Lebanon where one in four of the population is a refugee, in Jordan the right to work is being extended to refugees, financial support through aid responses to hosting nations. Sara just returned from Uganda, where Africa's largest refugee population is hosted. Uganda is a country that has kept its borders open and is praised globally for its approach to refugees. Uganda has a notably positive refugee policy, in a world where many countries are turning their backs on refugees.

Sara highlighted a year ago a UN led process began work to establish a Compact on Refugees. The global compact which will be negotiated over the next year should bring about the emergence of a new international accord on how the world shares responsibility for protection and support to refugees.

Sara noted that she has seen communities around the world rising to the refugee challenge, from Nigeria to Uganda, Lesbos to Glasgow people offering a welcome. Research by Amnesty International showed that 87 percent of people surveyed in the UK said they would welcome refugees to the country.

Sara outlined steps the UK can take both within and outside the global processes to support, protect and take its responsibility within the global refugee response. Praised the UK's aid support to refugees but challenged the UK Gov to allow family reunification and to work to ensure there are safe and legal routes of passage for refugees to make a traumatic process slightly easier to handle.

Sara stated the UK is currently one of the very few European nations to prevent unaccompanied children who have found safety in the UK from being joined here by their closest relations, even when they are traumatised and in need of the comfort, support and protection best provided by their family.

Sara concluded by reminding the Group that Scottish MP, Angus MacNeil, is using his Private Members Bill to focus on family reunification. Sara called for cross-party support of this bill as a step to the UK doing its 'fairshare' in the global refugee response. This Bill is about the lives of individuals who have faced decisions more difficult than you or I could imagine. Often embarking on dangerous journeys, they don't know they will survive. We must ensure our system welcomes people to safety with compassion and support.

At the heart of any global response we must remember this is about people, forced to flee in some of the worst circumstances anyone could face.

**Selina Hales:** Selina told the group she set up Refuweege in December 2015, after watching the horrors of war-torn Syria unfolding on television, stating she felt helpless, that she personally couldn't do anything, that was until she saw a news clip about a father and his small child, that was her tipping point, the point when she knew she needed to do something. She wanted to tap into the power of the community the power to change.

Within a couple of months she was in contact with Oxfam, after noting their campaign to change policy on family separation. Selina talked about hearing real life experience about refugees being separated from their family and the 18 months that some people had to endure to be reunited with their family, she stated she couldn't imagine what that wait felt like.

Refuweege started off in Selina's living room, but soon thanks to the generosity of people she needed premises. Selina went on to describe what Refuweege offered in their community packs from (i) essentials (ii) note pads, pens and local maps (iii) to Scottish items, like teacakes, irn brù, tartan (iv) a the most important a welcome letter personally handwritten by the public or a 'letter fae a local'.

Selina gave an example of a typical messages which stated.. 'I'm glad your now safe, welcome to Glasgow. I like pineapples what do you like?'

People are also encouraged to write back and lots of people do. Selina again stressed that the refugee community do volunteer in the local community. She is said that the gratitude refugees expresses from receiving the pack is overwhelming, for people that have suffered the lack of humanity to receive this simple human gesture is very emotional.

Refugees are branching out from just sending community packs they now hold community events, to get people involved around and within community.

Examples are BBQ event with old and new Scots, with food cooked by refugees to help share their culture, recent event 800 people didn't pay for food, as local people helped provide (local butcher etc) food.

Selina mentioned their first event which involved 14 displaced people going to a gig in barrowlands, the Sudanese group didn't speak English but still enjoyed themselves and formed friendships that to this day most of that group volunteer with Refugees to help other people coming to Scotland for the first time.

Refugees also now getting into partnerships with schools, holding workshops to reflect people's experiences and to share with others.

Selina ended by stressing the importance of the power of a letter wrote directly to a refugee, person to person. While many refugees are happy to be here they are still sad about their family left behind and the life they once had, no one chooses to be a refugee, Selina stated we need a change in policies that currently exist the UK need to be more welcoming and help reunite families this change will have a huge and positive impact.

### **Question and Answer session**

Questions were asked regarding child refugees, the root causes of refugees, the role of community, the role of faith groups, International agreement what's the progress? and questions centring about Myanmar.

Group was told about the Edinburgh World Justice Festival taking place on the 30<sup>th</sup>- 16<sup>th</sup> October.

Future topics for the group to discuss included International Trade, SDGs, Nelson Mandela centenary, political parties having a slot to tell group about their policies, Global citizenship & international development Education, Tourism (as a tool/driver of sustainable social and economic development), The role of the private sector in international development, Importance of Aid – combatting negative stories, Focus on an individual country from the strategy (not Malawi given they have their own CPG), Leave No-one Behind – domestic and international focus (potential joint event with Racial Equality CPG), Joint Event with Malawi CPG on 'Global Citizenship in the Scottish Health Service' Report, International trade (as a result of Brexit), Centenary of Nelson Mandela's Birthday, Climate Change (when Bill goes through parliament), International Development Strategy two years on, a review of sorts, Migrants – people on the move

**Lewis Macdonald closed the meeting stating that the Group agreed to hold alternative lunch time and evening meeting slots and people will be asked to support the different topics to be sent out by the secretariat.**