

Malawi Independence Day: Joint APPG-CPG Meeting
Monday 6th July, 5.30-6.30pm UK time / 6.30-7.30pm Malawi time

SUMMARY OF MEETING

Parliamentarians and Speakers in Attendance

- Alasdair Allan MSP
- Alexander Stuart MSP
- Alison Thewliss MP
- Allan Dorans MP
- Anne McLaughlin
- David Mundell MP
- Dr Sunduzwayo Madise
- Liam McArthur MSP
- Linda Fabiani MSP
- Lord Jack McConnell
- Margaret Ferrier MP
- Martyn Day MP
- Maureen Watt MSP
- Mr George Kasakula
- Mr Sam Alfandika
- Mrs Vera Kamtukule
- Patrick Grady MP
- Prof Mwapatsa Mipando
- Prof Paul Garside
- Richard Thompson
- Sarah Boyack MSP
- Stuart McMillan MSP
- Tony Lloyd MP
- Wendy Chamberlain MP

On Monday 6th July, Westminster's Malawi All-Party Parliamentary Group and Holyrood's Malawi Cross Party Group came together for a cross party (and cross parliament) digital meeting, to mark Malawi Independence Day. A full recording of the meeting can be found [here](#). Please check the video description for timestamps.

The first half of the meeting was chaired from Holyrood by Dr Alasdair Allan MSP, Co-Convenor of the Malawi CPG. The second half of the meeting was chaired from Westminster by Patrick Grady MP, Chair of the Malawi APPG.

NB: If you click each heading/sub-heading, this will take you to the respective section of the video recording.

23rd June Malawi Presidential Election: [Dr Alasdair Allan MSP, chairing, Scottish Parliament]

- **Mr Sam Alfandika, CEO, Malawi Electoral Commission**
 - Mr Alfandika gave an overview of the recent election in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Not all political parties adhered to Covid-19 preventative measures, but the Electoral Commission ensured that all measures possible were taken, and Mr Alfandika reflected on the new challenges and expenses this entailed, such as difficulty with enforcement. He also noted the lack of international observers due to travel restrictions, with the exception of those already resident in Malawi. He closed by confirming the Electoral Commission's satisfaction that the process had been credible and the outcome was a true reflection of the will of the people of Malawi, and has not been disputed by any of the contestants. The number of Covid-19 cases has increased, possibly as a result of the election, but increases have also been observed in other nearby countries, so other possible causes must also be investigated.

- **Mr George Kasakula, Chief Editor of Times Television**
 - Mr Kasakula explained that this was an interesting election to cover, due to it being court ordered and falling outside of the usual election cycle. The public media made an effort to give the people objective coverage of the proceedings. As each district was strongly encouraged to declare their result once counting was complete, it was very easy for the media to follow the outcome. The transparency of the Electoral Commission also allowed for much more effective reporting.
- **Mrs Vera Kamtukule, Chief Executive, Malawi Scotland Partnership**
 - Mrs Kamtukule joined a group of approximately 120 non-partisan professional observers for the election, and shared some of her experiences. One of the key things noticed was the vigilance of Malawian citizens to ensure that their vote was protected, something that has not been observed previously. Many waited near the polling stations to ensure their vote was posted, and rumours and fake news did compromise the security of the staff. However, with the exception of one incident where citizens suspected Mrs Kamtukule of holding ballot papers in her car, there were no reports of the observers feeling excluded. She closed by noting the coordination of the Malawi Defence Force, police and Electoral Commission to ensure the election was carried out in a peaceful and successful manner.
- **Dr Sunduzwayo Madise, Dean of the School of Law, Chancellor College**
 - Dr Madise gave his observations on the election from a legal and academic perspective. He explained that it was interesting to see the Electoral Commission's response to the illegal activities observed in the previous election, with significant effort being made this time to ensure all activities were carried out according to the law. For example, when counting was concluded at the polling stations, results were taken to the District Centres, rather than the Constituency Tallying Centres used last time. Results were also transmitted physically rather than digitally, and disputes were properly handled rather than being delegated to the secretariat. He concluded by saying that this was, from his perspective, the best managed and best organised election, which was especially interesting due to the short timeframe and essentially new Electoral Commission.
- **Q&A and discussion**
 - Mrs Joyce Juma-Phiri, Chief Executive of the Association of Malawians in Scotland, offered the support of the Malawian diaspora to help the new Government in Malawi.
 - What was responsible for the reduced number of null and void votes?
 - Mr Alfandika felt that, as this was only a single election, there was less confusion and procedures were easier to follow and understand. The errors made in last election were also fresh in people's memories due to the short timeframe, so more could be done to prevent these errors from happening again. He also noted that many of the null and void votes last election were protest votes. Dr Madise pointed out that null and void votes were particularly prevalent in certain areas of the country, so it may be useful to investigate literacy levels in these areas. Mrs Kamtukule echoed these statements, and noted that many of the election observers she worked with had low levels of literacy.

- Mr Stuart McMillan MSP is on the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Two years ago, the CPA published the Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures. He proposed that it may be useful for a short report on the Malawi election to be sent to the CPA for consideration and distribution across the Commonwealth.

Covid-19 in Malawi: [Mr Patrick Grady MP, chairing, UK Parliament]

- **Prof Mwapatsa Mipando, Principal of the College of Medicine, Blantyre**
 - Prof Mipando gave an update on Covid-19 numbers in Malawi, with a total of 1742 cases as of 5th July, 317 recoveries, 19 deaths and 1406 active cases. Things done well on a national level include closure of schools, public messaging, restrictions of church gatherings, improved hand washing practices and avoidance of hand shaking. Things not so well done include poor crowd control during the rallies and some other public gatherings, low use of face masks up until recently and inconsistent hand hygiene i.e. washing hands when entering a building but not continuing to wash hands once inside. There is also a rising number of infections among healthcare workers. The College and the Government are looking at ways to strengthen coordination around Covid-19 response, as a side effect of the pandemic has been other diseases not receiving the support that they need. He felt that the cancellation of the Presidential Inauguration and the President speaking two days in a row about Covid-19 were very important steps in educating people on the reality of the situation. Prof Mipando hopes that Health Surveillance Assistants will be introduced into every district as soon as possible, as this will help greatly with mobilisation. The President has also alluded to the provision of more equipment, and the College hopes that training will be available so that people know how to use this properly, especially in rural areas. The College will continue its Covid-19 research with a focus on what is most appropriate for Malawi.
- **Prof Paul Garside, Dean for Global Engagement (Africa & Middle East), University of Glasgow**
 - Prof Garside praised the Scotland Malawi Partnership's regular meetings looking at the pandemic in the content of the Scotland-Malawi bilateral relationship. One thing he thought pertinent to mention for Malawi Independence Day was Malawi's independence to have the capacity should a similar pandemic happen again.
- **Q&A and discussion**
 - Which areas of Malawi have been affected most by Covid-19?
 - There is no active surveillance at the moment, but there are hotspots in the cities. It has been identified that a large number of cases are coming in from those returning from South Africa and Tanzania. More support and equipment is needed before tracking is possible.
 - What mapping is there for risk factors?
 - There is no risk factor mapping yet, but there are plans to introduce this once funding is available. Work is being done with the University of Glasgow to learn from their systems and see if these would work in Malawi.

- Is lockdown an option and what measures can be taken to ensure successful implementation?
 - Lockdown is only useful if you know where the hotspots are. There are also problems with lockdown in Malawi as many rely on subsistence living, as the Government would also need to find ways to provide water and food packages to ensure people do not need to leave their homes. This is another reason why more coordination is important.

DFID-FCO Merger: [Mr Patrick Grady MP, chairing, UK Parliament]

- **Open discussion on the possible impact of the UK Government's decision to merge DFID with the FCO on the UK's work with Malawi**
 - The SMP is politically neutral and has very strong support for what the FCO and DFID do in Malawi. However, the SMP profoundly disagrees with the decision to merge DFID and the FCO and disagrees with the Prime Minister's statements conflating diplomacy with development; UK aid should and must continue to be driven for moral reasons other than the UK's political and commercial advancement. The SMP's full statement can be found [here](#).
- **Close of Meeting**