

# Cross-Party Group on International Development

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025, 18:00 – 19:40 Committee Room 5 and online

Minute

Present

MSPs

Sarah Boyack MSP – Chair  
John Mason MSP  
Liam Kerr MSP (Online)

Invited guests

Othman Moqbel (Action for Humanity)  
Tufail Hussain (Islamic Relief) - online  
Unni Krishnan (Plan International) - online  
Tom Griffiths (The HALO Trust) – online

Non-MSP Group Members

In person:

Fraser Macdonald Hay (Uniform November); Ian El-Paget (OneHeart); Aliya Tekanova (Heriot Watt University); Gulnara Dalgibercova (HWU); Lewis Ryder-Jones (Oxfam); Hallie Johnson (University of Edinburgh); Fatou Drammeh (UNICEF UK); Emma Wood (STEKAskills); Lillian Purich (Scotland Malawi Partnership); Calum Craig (The HALO Trust); Hamish Goldie-Scott (Engineering Outcomes Ltd); Jon Hudson (MSc CEID at U of Edinburgh); Benjamin Carey (Carey Tourism / SIDA); Frances Guy (SIDA); Harriet Dodd (Tophat Discovery CIC); Max Schmidt (Perspectives Climate Research); Maya Dhillon (NHS); Jamie Stark (Office of Sarah Boyack MSP); Patrick Grady (SIDA, Secretariat)

Online:

Aisha Izzet; Charles Lawley (Action 4 Humanity); Chrissie Hirst (Corra Foundation); Huw Owens (DEC); Jane Foster; Jane Salmonson (Firefly International); Janni Argent (University of Edinburgh); Larysa Zhdankina; Lizzy Macdonald; Nadeem Baqir

Apologies

None noted

## Agenda item 1 - Welcome and Housekeeping

Sarah Boyack welcomed all those attending in person and online.

The minutes of the last meeting, held jointly with the CPG on Malawi, on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2025 were formally proposed by Emma Wood and seconded by Sarah Boyack and approved by the meeting.

## Agenda item 2 – Panel and Discussion

Sarah Boyack introduced the theme of the meeting: current global humanitarian and emergency situations. The invited speakers represented organisations working in Sudan, two years after the outbreak of the civil war; Gaza, where the current conflict began on 7th October 2023; Ukraine, where Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022; and Myanmar, which was hit by a devastating earthquake on 28th March of this year. There would also be a chance to hear how Scotland responds to such situations through the Humanitarian Emergencies Fund (HEF).

The first presentation began with a short introduction from Huw Owen, External Relations Manager for the Disasters Emergency Committee in Scotland, noting that the earthquake which hit Myanmar on 28th March 2025 has now led to a death toll of over 3,500 lives. The DEC appeal launched on 3rd April and over £20million has been raised so far, including £5m UK Aid Match and £250,000 from the Scottish Government, with over £1million raised in Scotland.

Dr Unni Krishnan; Global Humanitarian Director; Plan International, then spoke in more detail about responses on the ground in Myanmar, with some photos illustrating the approaches to supporting people affected. This included the provision of 'dignity kits' to help meet essential immediate needs, as well as longer-term psycho-social support, especially for marginalised groups.

A short video followed, showing more reconstruction work in Myanmar led by the British Red Cross, with some information on how funding from Scotland is making a difference.

The next presentation was from Tufail Hussain, Director of Islamic Relief UK, who spoke in detail about the ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Sudan. He reflected on his experience of visiting camps for displaced people and the challenges caused by lack of basic infrastructure. He emphasised the need for world Governments, including the Scottish Government, to press for a ceasefire and an end to the conflict, as well as the provision of humanitarian relief.

Othman Moqbel, CEO of Action for Humanity, spoke about the conflict in Gaza and the death, destruction and population displacement it has caused, and referred to the International Court of Justice's findings in the case brought by South Africa about the risk of genocide taking place. He noted in particular the deaths of aid workers in the conflict - according to UNRWA, 408 aid workers including more than 280 UNRWA staff have been killed in Gaza since the war began on 7 October 2023. He called on the

Scottish Government to support efforts to lift the blockade on aid imposed by the Government of Israel on Gaza, and for an increase in humanitarian funding.

Tom Griffiths, Regional Director for Europe and the Americas, HALO Trust, spoke about the HALO Trust's work in Ukraine, beginning with an overview of the impact of funding it had received from the Scottish Government for a mine-clearance project in 2022-2023. He spoke about the scale of mines and munitions across the country, and the huge increase since the full-scale invasion in 2022. The HALO trust particularly works with demobbed combatants, often disabled, and is using a range of innovative technologies, including robots and drones, to detect and disarm unexploded ordnance.

Following the presentations, there was an opportunity for questions and discussion.

Frances Guy, Chief Executive of SIDA and Chair of the Scottish Government's HEF Panel, offered an opening reflection, thanking the speakers for their presentations which had been humbling for all attendees to hear. She outlined the role of the HEF, which provides around £1million each year (and sometimes more) from the Scottish Government to respond to overseas humanitarian emergencies. The HEF is administered by the Disasters Emergency Committee, supported by a panel of representatives from eight leading humanitarian organisations in Scotland who allocate funds with a focus on both high-profile appeals administered by the Disasters Emergency Committee and those less publicised crises which don't often draw the required attention and resources.

John Mason MSP asked for some further information on the root causes of the conflict in Sudan. Hamish Goldie-Scott asked about the importance of building design in preventing loss of life from earthquakes. Aisha Izzet asked for more information about how funding is distributed through structures like the HEF and DEC. Harriet Dodd offered some personal perspectives from her family experiences in Sudan. Huw Owen provided further information on the DEC's criteria for launching appeals. John Mason MSP asked about the impact of cuts to aid budgets around the world, particularly the closure of USAID.

## Agenda item 3 – CPG review of Scottish Government International Development Programme

Sarah Boyack outlined ongoing work to finalise the review document, which it is hoped can be circulated to MSP members of the group and approved for publication in the near future.

## Agenda item 4 – Next meeting(s)

The next meetings have been set for Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September and Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> November which will be the AGM. Possible topics include aspects of health, and COP30.

The meeting closed at 7:40pm