

Cross-Party Group on Tibet

Tuesday 25 February 2025, 6:00pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Ross Greer MSP (RG), Collette Stevenson MSP (CS)

Non-MSP Group Members

Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren (EBR), Roger Eames (RE), Cameron Garrett (CG), Linda Hendry (LH), Martin Mills (MM), Tenzin Kunga (TK), Jill Sudbury (JS)

Guests

Rashi Jauhri (RJ)

Apologies

Apologies received from Mercedes Villalba MSP, Rhoda Grant MSP, Ritchie Walker, Mark Watson, Linda Fabiani, Tsering Yangkey, Tenzin Choekyi, John Jones and Ron Scrimgeour

1. Welcome

RG welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies.

2. Approval of Minutes – 25 November 2024

Minutes of the November 2024 meeting were approved.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Update from the Office of Tibet / Tibet News

The Office of Tibet update largely replaced the Tibet news item as TC was ill and unable to provide a briefing.

TK told the group that celebrations for the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday will be taking place in London on 2nd and 5th July. The event on the 2nd is being organised by the Office of Tibet, while the one on the 5th is being organised by the Tibetan Community. Further details will be shared once arrangements have been finalised. Unfortunately, the tour of the Tashi Lhunpo monks has been cancelled.

TK thanked the CPG for the motion congratulating Sonam Frasi on the completion of his term as Representative and noted that TY is settling in well. TK also noted that the Westminster

APPGT has been reconstituted, with Chris Law as Chair, and will be hosting a Losar celebration in parliament again.

RG and CS both asked about the impact on the CTA of the US funding cuts. TK noted that there had been a real impact in Dharamsala but did not have much more detail at this stage.

EBR noted that the most significant news coming out of Tibet in recent months was the earthquake. The flow of information has currently stalled because of censorship. EBR also noted the death of the Dalai Lama's brother and it was suggested that a motion be lodged in parliament (CG to draft).

5. Update on Tibet Support Group Grampian

RE provided a brief summary of the history of Tibet Support Group Grampian, which was established in 1993. It is the only Free Tibet affiliated support group still running in the UK. The last meeting of the group was held in January 2023. It has not been possible to run meetings since then due to low numbers. A revival was attempted in 2024 with a draft programme of events but didn't really get off the ground. RE was keen for advice/suggestions on how to proceed.

MM noted that the nature of student engagement has changed since Brexit and that the group is now trying to get people on board who will stick around rather than leaving when their degree course ends.

MM also suggested a national Tibet support group to coordinate action happening locally. RE noted that a similar idea had been brought forward a few years ago but didn't get much traction. RG questioned how this would interact with the CPG and wanted to avoid duplication if the same people were sitting in two different groups having the same conversations.

It was felt that there could be room for two different national groups if the remits were different - and that the remits should be different as some activity perhaps didn't sit so well with a parliamentary group as it might with an independent group. It was agreed that this required further conversation.

RG suggested some collaboration between TSG Grampian and the Scottish Greens Aberdeen/shire branch. CS suggested speaking to the East Kilbride SNP branch about collaborating with the CPG or another Tibet group locally.

6. Campaign Update

EBR let the group know that a prayer ceremony was being organised for 10th March. This would take the place of a protest - due to the difficulty of generating sufficient numbers at protest events in Scotland - and would broadly follow the format of the Westminster annual wreath laying ceremony.

EBR explained that the CTA would be celebrating a "Year of Compassion" starting from the Dalai Lama's birthday in July. She suggested that the CPG host an event in parliament at some point during the year to mark the Dalai Lama's birthday. It was agreed EBR would contact the parliamentary events team to discuss availability.

7. Impact of US funding cuts on the movement

EBR provided a summary of the funding cuts which are currently being implemented in the US and how this is affecting the International Tibet Network and member groups around the world. Groups which have previously received a substantial proportion of their income from US grants are, naturally, feeling the impact more noticeably than those which don't. Some groups will have reduced capacity for a while until alternative income sources are identified. Campaigning capacity in the UK is likely to take a short-term hit due to the combined impact of funding cuts and upcoming changes at Free Tibet.

RJ added that the network still comprises around 140 member groups internationally and noted that many of the volunteer-led groups will be unaffected by the US issues. She also noted that the Tibet Network was going through a process of re-prioritising campaigns in order to make the best use of available resources.

RG suggested that the CPG write to the US Ambassador to highlight their concerns around the withdrawal of US funding for human rights work. EBR passed on a request from the Tibet Network that the CPG also write to David Lammy to ask for additional support from the UK during the transition period. This was agreed.

8. AOB

JS provided a summary of the campaign which had arisen in academic circles earlier in the year - this involved signatures being sought for an open letter calling on a journal to remove an article which was felt to be racist against Tibetans. EBR asked whether the CPG or other Tibet groups could provide any support or whether this would be counter-productive in an academic context. JS would check and advise.

RG advised the group that he will be visiting Dharamsala in April with EBR and CG. Suggestions for gifts for the Dalai Lama and Sikyong were discussed.

9. Action Point Summary

- RG/office to arrange letters to the US Ambassador and David Lammy.
- RG/office to contact SGP Aberdeen/shire branch and put them in touch with TSG Grampian.
- CS/office to contact EK SNP branch re Tibet support.
- RG/office to draft motion on the death of the Dalai Lama's brother.
- JS to advise on support re journal article.
- EBR to contact parliamentary events team re Dalai Lama birthday event.
- TK to share details of London birthday events once confirmed.
- EBR to confirm next meeting date via Doodle poll (to take place between Easter and summer recess, ideally May)

Meeting Ends