

Cross-Party Group on Cuba Q1.04

7th November 2024

Minute

Present

MSPs

Carol Mochan MSP - Convener
Mercedes Villalba MSP

Invited guests.

Neil Findlay speaking on behalf of invited guests from Justice for Colombia

Non-MSP Group Members

Leo Plumb- Staff member MSP office
Arthur West
Alan Grant

Apologies

Maggie Chapman
Elaine Smith
Kate Arnott

Agenda Item 1. Welcome and Introductions

Carol Mochan MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Agenda Item 2. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from previous meeting on 13th June 2024 were presented and approved by those in attendance.

Agenda item 3. Scottish Cuba Solidarity Update – Kath Campbell

Scottish Cuba Solidarity campaigns in the UK against the US blockade of Cuba and for the Cuban peoples' right to self-determination and sovereignty.

Kath Campbell provided updates of recent and frequent hurricanes which have impacted large parts of Cuba's national grid causing electricity blackouts. The United States embargo against Cuba has created additional pressure in short term relief and recovery from these natural disasters. Essential supplies including energy are very low across all regions, boats carrying fuel oil from Venezuela were turned back by the United States because of the blockade.

The CPG heard that in October 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for an end to economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed against Cuba which increasingly threatens the lives of people in the country. Contained in the resolution, the General Assembly agreed concerns about the fact that Lawsuits under title 3 of the Helms Button Act had been allowed by some member state. Concerns were also raised about the subsequent policies having had a cumulative effect on Cuban people. In January 2024, the UN Human Rights Council said the blockade was impacting Cuba's ability to guarantee food and decent standard of living for its people.

Kath explained that The United States of America in 2015 and 2016 adopted several measures which modified the embargo, alleviating some pressure on Cuba. However, that since 2017 Under President Trump these initiatives were ended. Donald Trump has been re-elected to United States president. There are fears his administration will again increase sanctions when signed to office.

During the last CPG, Kath described the impact of the US department of State designating Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. The CPG in November heard that recent events indicate this is having an international influence, for example the community organised solidarity brigades which journey to Cuba for different reasons are experiencing ever-increasing pressure.

Cuba also sends medically trained personnel to other states to support healthcare of international citizens under schemes known as Medical Brigades. Since 2020 the United States has denounced these programmes as forced labour: categorising the labour export programme as exploitative and seeking profit. Since then all United States administrations have enforced sanctions on third party countries who accept these brigades of medics. Due to pressure from the United States Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador have all recently cancelled participation with the Medical Brigade.

Agenda Item 4. Those in attendance discussed the issues raised.

Carol Mochan MSP, gave contributions about her personal recent experience in the United States of witnessing negative media representation of Cuba. Arthur West recalled the speaker at the previous meeting Rigoberto Zaza Ross had emphasised that the designation of Cuba on State Sponsored Terrorist Lists was having a substantial impact and that the Scottish CPG on Cuba helps raise awareness of this impact.

Following these discussions about the United Nations Resolutions, the CPG agreed that Parliamentary Questions and Motions could be submitted by MSP's in connection to these calls. These would focus on keeping the international conversation on the agenda and asking what further support Scotland can give to Cuba.

Mercedes Villalba, MSP shared a motion she submitted in 2021 which could be used as a basis for a future motion: [S6M-00598](#)

Agenda Item 5. Update from Neil Findlay on behalf of Justice for Colombia

Neil Findlay of Unity Consulting filled in for speakers from Justice for Colombia (JFC) who were unable to join remotely. JFC was set up in 2002 by the British trade union movement to support Colombian civil society in its struggle for human rights, labour rights, peace and social justice.

Neil praised the work of Justice for Colombia for their commitment to solidarity work with trade unions and community groups and explained his organisation's role in helping to raise the profile of this UK based organisation. On 1st November 2024, Unity Consulting organised an event in Glasgow to raise funds for a school bus to help the children of former combatants in the civil war in Colombia.

It was highlighted that serious human rights violations have remained at a high level in Colombia for many years where it has been dangerous to be identified as an activist, a former FARC Combatant or a Trade Union Member. JFC have recently campaigned in favour of enhanced workers' rights in the form of a labour code for contracts and wages and against efforts by some employers to punish workers for Trade Union affiliation. There has also been a focus on land reform to strengthen rights of agricultural workers.

Connections between Cuba and Colombia were summarised, including the Cuban scholarship programme to support Colombians to train in medicine. It was also mentioned that Cuba and Norway were official facilitators of the peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP. It was highlighted that the current Government are committed to peace despite challenges from blocks of the Colombian Parliament. It was reported that The United States and its allies have been involved in previous attempts to provoke escalations at the borders of Colombia.

Neil Findlay thanked Mercedes Villalba MSP for her previous questions to a Scottish Government Minister about Police training programmes provided to the National Police of Colombia considering fears around human rights abuses conducted by Police in that country at that time.

It was agreed by those present that considering these connections there are multiple ways to extend solidarity with Colombia. Attendees agreed efforts would be made to ensure a speaker from JFC could present at a future CPG for Cuba.

Agenda Item 6. AOCB

{Are these relevant to include?} The Scottish Cuba Solidarity Campaign provided the following information about its most recent and next activities, emphasising that any member or supporter of the Campaign is welcome to attend this meeting - which plans future campaign activities.

- Their AGM took place on 3rd November 2024
- The Campaign has a stall at the Morning Star Xmas Bazaar on Saturday 23rd November.
- Next meeting will be held on Wednesday December 4th online.
- The next Vigil to protest the US blockade of Cuba takes place on Thursday December 19th in Glasgow.

- New year meetings will take place in Edinburgh and Glasgow

Neil Findlay informed attendees that:

- The organisation PAX Christie International; a Catholic peace movement will be arranging representatives from Colombia to visit the UK in January 2025.
- Unity Consulting will likely plan future events focussed on peace where discussions from the CPG could be continued.

Agenda Item 7. Date of Next meeting

This will be agreed by the secretariate and Carol Mochan's MSP office.