

Cross-Party Group on Fair Trade

Thursday 5 February 2026 at 6pm, online and in Parliament

Minute

Present

MSPs

John Mason MSP
Sarah Boyack MSP

Invited guests

Laura Sarabia, Colombian Ambassador to the UK
Giovanni Porras, Supply & Sustainable Development Manager, FruAndes, Colombia
Ruth Mary (Rutie) Ballestas, MD, Fruto del Espiritu CIC, UK

Non-MSP Group Members

Agnes H
Carmen Hernandez-Garcia
Chris Johnstone
Frank Meehan
Ivan Hernandez
Joanna Khan
Juan Andres Santelices
Kiera Wilkins
Louise Davies
Maria Huertas
Mariana Mora
Mulenga Nyondo
Rachel Farey
Russell Salton
Terry Roberts
Carol Ryall
Rachel Mackenzie
Andy Ashcroft
Anne Walsh
Carol Morton
Eve Broadis
Gerard Hastings
Craig Sullivan

Jan MacGregor
Jeanette Mcivor
Jeannie Morgan
Linsey Latter
Liz Manson
Morag Rennie
Pam Maxwell
Rebecca Pollitt
Winifred Wilson

Agenda items 1 & 2: Welcome & Apologies

John Mason MSP opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. He introduced the session, noting a focus on Fair Trade as a tool for economic development, community resilience and international partnership.

Apologies

Katy Clark MSP
Claire Baker MSP
Rona Mackay MSP
Tim Eagle MSP
Maggie Chapman MSP
Lesley Hinds
Charles Sim
Kirsty Connell, Coop
Jane Forster

Agenda item 3: Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved – proposed by Morag Rennie and seconded by John Mason.

Agenda item 4: Laura Sarabia, Colombian Ambassador to the UK

The Ambassador opened by emphasising that Fair Trade should not be seen as a marginal or niche market, but as a model that supports sustainable development, strengthens communities, and builds long-term economic resilience.

She highlighted Colombia's strong relationship with Fair Trade, noting:

- The presence of Fair Trade producers across multiple regions of the country
- The importance of coffee and other agricultural exports as key livelihoods
- The role of Fair Trade in supporting rural communities, particularly in post-conflict settings

The Ambassador stressed that Fair Trade contributes not only to economic outcomes but also to peacebuilding, by providing viable alternatives to illicit economies and supporting stable rural employment.

She referenced the scale of impact, including:

- Significant numbers of farmers engaged in Fair Trade supply chains
- Ongoing efforts to expand market access and increase value for producers
- The importance of engaging young people in agriculture to ensure future sustainability

She also noted the environmental dimension, including organic production and the need to respond to climate pressures affecting crops and yields.

The Ambassador positioned Fair Trade as part of a broader diplomatic and economic relationship, describing it as a practical tool for strengthening ties between countries such as Scotland and Colombia.

Agenda item 5: Giovanni Porras, Supply & Sustainable Development Manager, FruAndes, Colombia and Ruth Mary (Rutie) Ballestas, MD, Fruto del Espiritu CIC, UK

The presentations covered a range of themes including market access, consumer engagement, and the role of policy.

It was noted that:

- Fair Trade remains a relatively small proportion of total global trade, with significant room for growth
- There is a need to increase awareness and demand, particularly among younger consumers
- Ethical consumption alone is not sufficient; wider structural and policy changes are required
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The speakers discussed the balance between:

- Consumer action (e.g. purchasing Fair Trade products)
- Systemic change, including legislation and corporate accountability

There was also reflection on the role of Fair Trade within international development, including:

- Its contribution to income stability and community development
- Its potential to support climate resilience
- The importance of ensuring that producers capture greater value within supply chains

Agenda item 6: Discussion

Questions were raised about:

- Export challenges and market barriers

- The proportion of production that reaches Fair Trade markets
- The Fairtrade International certification approach to the value chain and how this could be challenged to better support producers
- How to scale impact without losing integrity

Agenda item 7: Close

John Mason confirmed that this would be the last CPG of the Parliamentary term and the group would need to reconvene after the election. He suggested considering merging with other CPGs to encourage better MSP attendance. John thanks Scottish Fair Trade for their secretariat support. Louise from Scottish Fair Trade thanked John as deputy convenor and Sarah for their ongoing support.

The meeting closed at 7:30pm.