

8th Parliament of the world's regions

16 January 2020

Reference: SPCB(2020)Paper 2

Executive Summary

1. This Paper seeks the SPCB's approval to support in principle Scotland's bid to host the 8th Parliament of the World's Religions in 2021 or 2022.

2. The Events and Exhibitions Team have been approached by organisers of Scotland's bid to host future parliaments. The organisations responsible for the Scotland bid include Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace (EICSP); the Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society (SABS); and Edinburgh Interfaith Association (EIFA).

Background

3. Parliament of the World's Religions is headquartered in Chicago and was created to cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world. Its goal is to create a global dialogue of faiths.

4. The Parliament allows attendees to gather to celebrate, discuss and explore how religious traditions can work together on the critical issues which confront the world. Approximately 220 religious and spiritual communities and organisations meet to co-operate and add value to each other's activities building long term partnerships for the future.

5. The first Parliament took place in Chicago in 1893 with the second one taking place in 1993 on its centenary. The last two parliaments took place in Salt Lake City (2015) and Toronto (2018) respectively. The next parliament will be the 8th Parliament of the World's Religions.

6. Scotland has been invited to prepare a bid to host one of the next three Parliament of the World's Religions. A joint bid is currently being prepared between Glasgow and Edinburgh to host the 8th Parliament of the World's Religions.

7. If unsuccessful in this bid it is likely that Scotland will be considered for subsequent parliaments in 2024 and 2027.

8. A Bid Steering Group has been established by the organisers and includes them along with Interfaith Scotland; Interfaith Glasgow; University of

Edinburgh; University of Glasgow; and Religions for Peace and representatives of many religions Baha'i; Buddhist; Church of Scotland; Scottish Episcopal Church; United Reformed Church; Hindu; Scottish Council of Jewish Communities; Muslim Council of Scotland; and Sikh.

9. It is anticipated that the conference would take place at the SECC and associated venues in Glasgow over seven days in early June 2021 or 2022 with approximately 10,000 attendees. In addition, to this various add on events would take place in Edinburgh over a two-day period immediately prior to the week-long event in Glasgow. Exact dates are to be agreed should the bid be successful.

Discussion

10. Hosting the Parliament in Scotland is an excellent opportunity to showcase the country's strengths and for Scotland to also benefit from global engagement and exposure on a religious world stage. The event has the potential to widen Scotland's appeal to a global audience. The conference brings together diverse religious and spiritual communities and creates opportunity to build mutually respectful and cooperative future relations within wider society.

11. The event brings with it significant economic benefit to Scotland due to the scale of the event including a high number of hotel rooms that would be taken and associated delegate spend in Scotland with potential for extended and return visits from delegate exposure as a result of the conference. The bid to host the Parliament of the World's Religions requires no financial support from the Scottish Parliament.

12. Both Glasgow and Edinburgh are well placed from a technical point of view for the bid in terms of venues, hotels, restaurants and transportation infrastructure.

13. This event provides an opportunity for the Parliament to support a global event with key benefits to Scotland. If the bid is successful organisers may explore the potential for an event to take place at the Scottish Parliament as part of the two-day pre-Parliament programme in Edinburgh. Supporting the initial bid does not commit the Parliament to any future events. Any event would be subject to future SPCB approval.

14. Many key Scottish and UK-wide organisations are supporting the bid. The Scottish Government, through the Office of the First Minister is offering their support to the bid and others supporting the bid include the UK Government; City of Edinburgh Council; Convention Edinburgh; Glasgow City Council; and Glasgow Convention Bureau.

15. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the bid with no subsequent issues. Attendees may include some of the protected groups and given this diverse participation the event provides an opportunity for the groups to meet and foster good relationships.

Communications Approach

16. Most media attention would likely be focused on the main Parliament of the World's Religions event at the SECC, but communications efforts would be made by the Scottish Parliament to emphasise our role, including to specialist religious outlets, and through our social media channels.

Recommendation

17. Considering the anticipated benefits for Scotland in hosting this event, we would recommend that the SPCB agree in principle to support this bid by providing the letter of support to the organisers of Scotland's bid (**Annex A**).

Resource Implications

18. There are no costs to the SPCB in providing support to the bid.

Publication Scheme

19. This Paper can be published once the letter has been issued.

Next Steps

20. If the SPCB supports the bid in principle the letter of support from the Presiding Officer will be issued accordingly. If the bid is successful, updates will be provided to the Head of the Events and Exhibitions Team on a quarterly basis who in turn will update the SPCB as appropriate.

21. As part of the bid process the Head of the Events and Exhibitions Team will meet with the Chair of the Parliament of the World's Religions and the Chair of the Selection Committee prior to autumn 2020 as part of a site visit.

Decision

22. The SPCB is asked to consider this Paper and associated Annex and agree in principle to support Scotland's bid to host the 8th Parliament of the World's Religions in Scotland in 2021 or 2022.

Events and exhibitions team

Neill Walker
Co-Founder, Executive Secretary and Director
Edinburgh International Centre for Spirituality and Peace
By email: mesp2008@hotmail.co.uk

16 January 2020

Dear Mr Walker,

Thank you very much for your email seeking the Scottish Parliament's support for Scotland's bid to host the 8th Parliament of the World's Religions in 2021/22.

I would be delighted to offer the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's support for the bid and would welcome the 8th Parliament of the World's Religions to be hosted in Scotland.

Hosting the 8th Parliament of the World's Religions provides an opportunity to showcase the country's strengths and for Scotland to also benefit from global engagement and exposure on a religious world stage. The event has the potential to widen Scotland's appeal to a global audience. The Parliament brings together diverse religious and spiritual communities and creates opportunity to build mutually respectful and cooperative future relations within wider society.

In the meantime, can I ask you to keep the Parliament's Head of Events and Exhibitions, Roy Devon informed as the bid progresses (roy.devon@parliament.scot / 0131 348 6701). Roy and his team will make necessary arrangements for any site visit involving the Scottish Parliament.

I am copying this letter to your co-signatories Shabir Beg and Iain Stewart and extend best wishes to you all for a successful outcome.

Yours sincerely

RT HON KEN MACINTOSH MSP