

## **Cross Party Group on Malawi:**

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013, 1.30 – 3pm

Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 5

### Attendees

1. Maureen Watt MSP
2. Richard Simpson MSP
3. Liam McArthur MSP
4. Claudia Beamish MSP
5. Andy Bevan, International Justice Mission UK
6. Brian Kerr, The Soko Fund
7. Charlie Ager, Scotland Malawi Partnership
8. David Stevenson, SMP Member
9. David Hope-Jones, Scotland Malawi Partnership
10. Geoff Earl, SMP Member
11. Gil Long, Glasgow University
12. Heiron Williamson
13. Helen Sims, Scotland Malawi Partnership
14. Jack Thompson, SMP Director
15. Joyce Phiri
16. Iain Wallace, Scottish Parliament
17. Karen Garrott, CBM
18. Katie Stellard, Scotland Malawi Partnership
19. Ken Ross, SMP Director
20. Lindsay Graham, The Soko Fund
21. Martyn Edelsten, SMP Member
22. Pat Bryden, CSIM
23. Peter West, Honorary Consul
24. Ryan Cassidy, Students for Malawi
25. Sarah Boyack MSP
26. Seraphine Chiphaliwali, Living Waters Church
27. Tamara Mhura, APSTAR
28. Tom Smith, Dunblane Likhubula Partnership

**(1) Maureen Watt MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the speakers**

**(2) Apologies were noted from Siobhan McMohan MSP, Neil Merrylees, Alan Kimmitt, Pam Wilson, Malonje Phiri, Claire Martin and Colin Cameron**

**(3) The minutes of the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012 meeting were accepted as accurate by the group**

**(4) Update on visit to Scotland by Malawi High Commissioner**

Peter West, Hon. Consul, summarised the successful visit by the new Malawi High Commissioner, Mr Bernard Sande, to Scotland. The High Commissioner left Scotland enthused by the strengths of the links between Scotland and Malawi.

DHJ noted enthusiasm of High Commissioner and thanked Peter West, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament for ensuring the visit was a success.

**(5) Gillian Long, Active Learning Centre**

At the last CPG it was suggested it would be good to focus at this meeting on gender equality. The Scotland Malawi Partnership has been running its "Gender Matters" campaign since September last year. The aim of the campaign is to raise the profile of gender equality as a cross-cutting theme across Scotland-Malawi links.

Maureen Watt MSP introduced the first speaker, Gillian Long.

Gillian works with The Active Learning Centre and explained that it aims to promote build democratic participation and implement human rights through research and education with civil organisations, their members and elected representatives. One ALC project in Malawi has established Rights Advice Centres (RACs) in Dedza and Mangochi and 16 outreach services extending to the rural areas. The focus of the centres is on delivery of information and advice on social, economic civic rights which are key for women: issues of divorce, child maintenance, domestic violence and inheritance of property. Seventy per cent of the users of the RACS are women but the aim is also to help and empower other vulnerable groups including the elderly, the young, people with disabilities and people living with HIV/AIDS. GL described the key principles of the RACs as free, confidential, impartial, independent and empowering.

GL highlighted the RAC's efforts to work with traditional justice systems in Malawi (i.e. village chiefs) in order to build local ownership. Chiefs are given knowledge of statute to ensure fair justice. The aim is not to override the traditional system, but to inform and empower it.

The RACs and their outreach services are staffed by more 125 volunteer paralegal. On average the RACs are dealing with 250 cases per month. The new Legal Aid Act in Malawi extends legal aid to civil matters and recognizes that civil society and paralegals will be needed to supplement the work of the Legal Aid Bureau – currently there is only one qualified lawyer for every 37,500 people.

#### **(6) Lindsay Graham, The Soko Fund**

Lindsay Graham is a director of The Soko Fund which supports women to gain access to higher education in Malawi. The Soko Fund was established in 2003, and has supported nearly 65 women to complete their degrees and continue onto employment. It works with 3 universities across Malawi and is currently supporting 18 women (a figure that it hopes to double). LG explained that the focus of Soko Fund is women studying vocational subjects (education, medicine, nutrition, law). LG highlighted the demand for professionals in these areas in Malawi – there are just 0.019 doctors to every 1000 people in Malawi, compared to 2.3 per 1000 in UK. It costs \$550 per year to support a student with the scholarship covering tuition fees, accommodation and a modest living allowance mostly used for internet access. Students must attain a qualifying grade to receive their sponsorship.

LG explained why the SF focuses on higher education: infrastructure needs qualified professionals. The SF works through existing structures and universities in Malawi. It is thought that training students in the country means that they are more likely to stay and work in the country, helping development. The SF focuses on woman as it aims to reach the most disadvantaged. Additionally it is thought that by educating women it improves the lives of their families too and improves family health.

SF aims to enable Malawi's development through improving infrastructure, in addition to individual development and situation.

#### **(7) Questions, answers and discussions with Gillian Long and Lindsay Graham**

It was noted that people from other regions in Malawi, such as the North, could benefit from expansion of the legal resource centres. GL agreed and explained the RACs are currently at pilot

stage but the long-term vision is for expansion. Currently the RAC project also runs radio programmes and the phone-ins which are used by people from the North and other regions. In addition the Legal Aid Bill envisages more providers replicating this type of service across the country. There has also been an application to the Scottish Government for funding in order to develop a network of RACs and similar organisations .

The importance of legal advice was commended and the importance of raising awareness of domestic violence was noted. It was also stressed that domestic violence is not discriminatory of background, it can affect professionals and those in the urban areas too. GL said the Domestic Violence Act was an attempt to make progress in this area. However this was not taken up by many women due to fear, tradition and family values. GL explained this is why educating chiefs about the law and statutory justice is important; so that traditional justice supports victims too.

DHJ asked LG for advice about the selection process used by the Soko Fund for scholarship candidates. LG highlighted the usefulness of a small organization – it simplifies monitoring and evaluation and allows for relationships to be developed with candidates and chancellors. LG explained the key was to find trustworthy people in Malawi and to withdraw if there is any indication of bias taking place. The useful role of the MaSP in helping in the selection process was also suggested as a good starting point.

An opportunity for the RACs to network with Strathclyde University and NUS Scotland was also highlighted – it is supporting the setting up a law society for students in Malawi.

### **(8) Topics for future meetings**

The next meeting is to be held on 17th April 2013, 5.30-7pm. Students from Dundee University will be speaking about their medical electives in Malawi.

It is also hoped that there will also be an opportunity to hear highlights from the David Livingstone Bi-Centenary events.

### **(9) Any Other Business**

Charlie Ager spoke about the SMP's Gender Matters campaign and asked members to fill in their postcards about this.

All female members were invited to attend the Malawi Women Association meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> February in Edinburgh.

Additionally, DHJ spoke about the Enough Food IF Campaign. The SMP is playing a role in the campaign and would encourage members to get involved and spread the word. The G8 summit is in June and the aim is for the campaign to be part of the agenda.