The Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA)

Purpose

1. The Branch Secretary has been approached by the former UK MEP, John Corrie, who has been wishing to ascertain whether the Branch would be interested in working in partnership with ‘the Association of European Parliamentarian’s with Africa’ (AWEPA). This paper provides background on the role of AWEPA and seeks the view of the Branch on whether Members wish to seek further information on the scope for co-operation with AWEPA. Mr Corrie has suggested that AWEPA’s Director of Research and Evaluation, Dr Jeff Balch, would be willing to speak to the Branch about the opportunities for Members arising from AWEPA membership.

Role of AWEPA

2. Originally termed the Association of West-European Parliamentarians for Action against Apartheid the organisation was founded, in 1984, with the aim of mobilising democratically elected European parliamentarians to end apartheid. After South Africa’s apartheid regime was overthrown, the focus became promoting democracy, peace, human rights and democratic governance in many African regions. The organisation was renamed, in 1993, the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (“AWEPA”).

3. AWEPA states that the organisation has one central aim, common to all the contexts in which it operates, which is the pursuit of parliamentary excellence. AWEPA’s seeks to increase the capacity and performance of parliaments, so that they are confident, empowered and effective to deal with a wide range of human rights and development challenges, not least those emanating from common concerns such as food, fuel and employment crises, corruption, climate change, immigration and terrorism.

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1 The information regarding AWEPA is drawn from information on the AWEPA website which can be accessed at: http://www.awepa.org/
4. In particular, AWEPA seeks to concentrate its activities on—

- Parliaments’ roles in facilitating democracy, human rights, peaceful conflict management, poverty reduction and sustainable development;
- Attaining gender equality at all levels of political decision-making;
- Interests common to African and European parliamentarians; and,
- Building parliamentary networks and experience-sharing at national, regional and inter-regional levels.

Membership

5. AWEPA’s membership is composed of European parliamentarians working in partnership with their African counterparts. Each ‘side’ offers the other its professional expertise, its experience and its influence in the parliamentary process. AWEPA currently has a membership of over 1,800 members, and former members, from Parliament’s across the European Union (and Norway and Switzerland). The European Parliament is also a member. Flanders is the only EU sub-Member State legislature which is a member of AWEPA. The AWEPA website states that membership is open to current, and former, Members of Parliament. It is not clear beyond this, what the implications of membership are either for individual Members or Parliaments as a whole.

6. AWEPA draws attention to certain features that flow from its membership model:

- It is driven by political leadership
- A common vision of reinvigorated parliaments as the foundations of future democracy, peace and prosperity
- Its neutrality, arising from electoral turnover, in the peer-learning service to new and incumbent African and European parliamentarians, who learn from each other how best to strengthen their democracies, and who renew the policy debate on how to improve African-European relations.

Financial Implications

7. It is not clear what financial implications, if any, would arise from membership of AWEPA.

Decision

8. Members are invited to decide:

- Whether to invite Dr Balch from AWEPA, to a future meeting of the Branch, to discuss the role of AWEPA and what membership of the organisation involves.
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