COMMONWEALTH DAY OBSERVANCE EVENT REPORT

Report by Eilidh Collins MSYP for Angus North and the Mearns

Background Note

The purpose of this paper is to ask Members of the Branch Executive Committee to note the contents of the report submitted by Eilidh Collins MSYP for Angus North and the Mearns. The report provides an account of her participation in the Commonwealth Day Observance Event which took place in London from on 10 March 2014.

A copy of the report is attached at Annex A.

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Annex A

COMMONWEALTH DAY OBSERVANCE EVENT 10 MARCH 2014

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1. On 10th March, I was fortunate enough to represent Scotland at the annual Commonwealth Day celebrations in London. The programme I participated in was organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Organisation, and centred around this year’s theme for the Observance – Team Commonwealth.

2. The day started in the Houses of Parliament, where I met with the other participants, who represented countries across the Commonwealth, from the Norfolk Islands and Nigeria to Guyana and Ghana. It was an incredible opportunity to interact with other young people from across the globe, and discuss the issues most relevant to young people in their home nation. This was particularly evident during the debate we held, which centred on the question; “How will this year’s theme, Team Commonwealth, foster prosperity and co-operation across the Commonwealth?”. Numerous issues were raised, such as flooding in the Caribbean, cultural preservation and the recent boycotts of Commonwealth events. The debate was chaired by Mr David Crausby MP, who proved to be an entertaining and engaging chair. We then had a question and answer session with His Excellency Garvin Nicholas, High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago, and Sir Lockwood Smith, High Commissioner for New Zealand. This gave an incredible insight into the work a High Commissioner performs, and again increased my knowledge of international diplomacy.

3. After this session, we then crossed from Parliament to Westminster Abbey, where the Commonwealth Observance Service was conducted. This was in the presence of the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, as well as many other influential figures from across the Globe. We heard speeches from Lord Seb Coe, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thomson and Malala Yousafzai, as well as performances from Laura Mvula, the Gordon School Pipes and Drum band and Visual Statement, a Glaswegian dance company. The highlight of the service for me was Malala’s speech. Malala was shot by the Taliban in 2012 for continuing to go to school despite the Taliban’s ban on women in education. It was incredible to see her still campaigning and standing up for what she believes in despite being through such a horrific ordeal. I found it particularly inspiring that she is only 16 years old, making her tremendous bravery and courage even more incredible. The whole service was very uplifting, promoting hope for ever improving international relations throughout the Commonwealth and inspiring young people to promote equality and co-operation in their home countries.

4. I was then also invited to attend an afternoon tea party at the Terrace Pavilion at the Houses of Parliament. There, I got the opportunity to speak to many senior politicians from all across the Commonwealth, such as the Canadian Senator, the Chair of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth
Parliamentary Association, and the Chairman of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I enjoyed talking to them about Angus and Scotland as a whole, and discussing the issues that affect young people in my area. It was also a great opportunity to talk further with some of the other delegates, and exchange details to keep communicating on the work we are doing in our countries. I also talked about the Scottish Youth Parliament's national campaign Care.Fair.Share, which created interest from both international politicians and fellow delegates. It was a great way to round off a day that had been full of opportunity to raise Angus and Scotland’s profile to other young people and ensure the issues that affect the young people of Scotland are discussed at an international level.

5. I feel like the day definitely increased my awareness of global issues, as well as giving me inspiration for things to do in my constituency as an MSYP. It was one of the best experiences I have had as an MSYP, and a fantastic opportunity to share opinions and ideas on both domestic and global issues that affect young people.