Scottish Poppy Appeal 2011 Launch Reception – Presiding Officer Remarks

26 October 2011

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Tricia Marwick and, as Presiding Officer, I am delighted to welcome you to the Scottish Parliament and to this evening’s parliamentary launch of the 2011 Scottish Poppy Appeal.

It is a great honour for me to continue with the tradition of the Presiding Officer hosting this important annual event, and particularly so given that this year marks the 90th anniversary of the Scottish Poppy Appeal.

The Scottish Poppy Appeal is the sole charity to be recognised by the Parliament, and I am delighted to see so many of my parliamentary colleagues here this evening, including my predecessor Alex Fergusson, who is I know a member of Poppyscotland’s Board of Directors.

This is then my first opportunity to host a parliamentary reception for Poppyscotland and, in order to become better acquainted with the charity’s work, I recently had the great privilege of visiting the fund’s headquarters at New Haig House and, next door, the famous Lady Haig Poppy Factory.

I received a very warm welcome there both from your Chief Executive, Ian MacGregor, and from the 40-strong workforce who were busily assembling poppies and the many other poppy-related products that were flowing off the factory’s production line. I have to say that my own attempt at hand assembling a poppy was not a great success…

The production of poppies is of course the most widely recognised activity at the Lady Haig factory. To that end, each year the factory produces some five million poppies, ten thousand wreaths, and processes over twenty five thousand collection
tins, which are distributed to members of Poppyscotland’s fund-raising army right across Scotland.

But there is much, much more to the work of Poppyscotland, and indeed its fundraising efforts continue throughout the year. The charity works with a number of veterans’ charities around the country in supporting the provision of a wide range of care and support services for veterans; and Poppyscotland is also very much at the forefront of efforts to support younger veterans to find work and adapt to civilian life.

The provision of veterans’ care and support is an emotive issue that touches many Members across this Parliament. And I know that my colleagues here at Holyrood very much appreciate this annual opportunity to receive an update on your work over the last 12 months.

We prepare to mark Rememberance Day next month, having only recently passed the tenth anniversary of operations in Afghanistan.

This prolonged period of our forces being in conflict has had the inevitable, but nonetheless regretful, effect of increasing the demand for veterans’ care and support services.

As a result, Poppyscotland and the many other veterans organisations, continue to face huge challenges and pressures in meeting their objectives. It is therefore more important than ever that Parliament, and the people of Scotland, continue to support both our armed forces and our armed forces veterans; and I hope that the whole country will unite behind this year’s appeal.

Ladies and gentlemen, on that note, I am delighted to play my part in helping launch the 2011 Scottish Poppy Appeal here this evening; and on behalf of the entire
Scottish Parliament, I wish everyone involved at Poppyscotland the very best of luck for this year’s appeal.