



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 15 September 2015

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 15 September 2015*

*[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]*

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Pastor Stephen Kato of the New Destiny Christian Centre, Kamuli, Uganda.

**Pastor Stephen Kato (New Destiny Christian Centre, Kamuli, Uganda):** With a grateful heart, we bless God for this great country of warriors—not only physical warriors but spiritual warriors who sacrificed their lives to death to bring the gospel to us in Africa. I stand here in this honourable house as a fruit of this great sacrifice and a living testimony that this country's missionaries' work was not in vain.

The outstanding impact of this great country is felt everywhere in Uganda. Each time people worship the God of heaven in Uganda, they are worshipping the God of Scotland. I am not sure anyone from Uganda has ever come here to say thank you, but in case no one has, I stand to do so now on behalf of all Ugandans.

Living in this season of global terrorist threat, the devil seeks to create fear between individuals, yet God also is using people to bring a positive impact into the same countries. That brings us to a point of reflection. For Uganda to change, we had to receive people from Scotland, and for Scotland to experience on-going transformation, it needs to be ready to receive people that God is sending.

As Dr Livingstone came and left the living word and we became living stones, it is my hope and my prayer that Scotland remains a vibrant example of the living word, Jesus Christ.

In Uganda we have a proverb, "Ogudiza guba mwoyo", which means, "It takes a good heart to give back". The reason why I am in Scotland today is that I am a good man with a good heart and I serve a good God.

In this time of reflection, we want to reflect more on our strengths than on our weaknesses, to reflect more on our achievements than our losses. Scotland has benefited a lot of people and it is my prayer that God maintains the Christian foundations of this great nation and that Jesus remains the pillar and saviour of every individual in Scotland.

I apologise that my twin brother, Godfrey Waswa, is not able to be with me today. Unfortunately, he had some unexpected and challenging circumstances back home that made it impossible for him to come. However, we look forward to a future opportunity for the twin brothers to bring a double blessing to the Scottish Parliament.

God bless you, and God bless Scotland.

## Business Motion

14:04

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-14254, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for today.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 15 September 2015—

after

2.00 pm                      Time for Reflection – Pastor Stephen Kato, New Destiny Christian Centre, Kamuli, Uganda

*followed by*                Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert

*followed by*                Ministerial Statement: Future Prosperity for the North Sea—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## North Sea

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a statement by Fergus Ewing on future prosperity for the North Sea. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement; there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

14:05

**The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** Last week, I attended the Offshore Europe conference. My reflection from that event is that there is a shared determination in the industry to collaborate and overcome the current challenges, which are made more difficult by the low oil price—not that that should compromise safety; as Lord Cullen remarked in his speech to the Piper 25 conference in 2013, the industry must never forget to be afraid.

The Oil & Gas UK economic report suggests that industry efforts are starting to bear fruit. First, costs are decreasing, with a 22 per cent reduction in the cost of operating existing assets expected by the end of 2016. Secondly, annual production is expected to rise for the first time in 15 years.

In my engagement with the industry, I am encouraged by some of the great work that is going on. For example, I have met the new chief executive of Statoil to discuss the Mariner project; I have met Philippe Guys of Total to discuss Laggan and Tormore; I have met Maersk to learn about its Culzean project; and I have met Trevor Garlick of BP, which is taking forward Clair and the eastern trough area project—ETAP.

However, job losses remain a huge concern. The First Minister took decisive action in that regard by setting up the energy jobs task force. The task force will publish its latest update report shortly, and I want to share some of the action that has been taken so far. The task force has engaged with more than 1,700 individuals and more than 100 employers to help people who are affected to move into new employment, new ventures or training. Much of that support, including one-to-one redundancy support for 1,300 people, has been delivered through the partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—programme.

The task force has also considered structural challenges, making cost efficiency a priority and looking at best practice from other sectors, as well as considering challenges around leadership. That has led to initiatives that will lay the foundations for improvements across a wide range of action areas. Examples include a groundbreaking cross-sector workshop, which was attended by more

than 70 industry leaders in Aberdeen in May and was led by Trevor Garlick of BP and Andy Samuel, chief executive of the Oil and Gas Authority; five business events over the past six months in Aberdeen for more than 200 delegates, which covered topics such as financial resilience and leadership through change; and a business start-up support programme with 13 new businesses in the north-east. I am grateful to Dr Lena Wilson and her team for the work that they have undertaken, which has made a significant difference.

However, further action is required. The Oil and Gas Authority has an important role to play in improving stewardship of the North Sea. I met Andy Samuel again last week, when he gave me an update on progress. I support the work that he and his team are doing at the OGA and reaffirm our commitment to playing a constructive part. I am pleased that the OGA has accepted, in its work, the principle of total value added, which the Scottish Government put forward last year.

The OGA has made protecting critical infrastructure and avoiding early decommissioning a priority. It is imperative that so-called production hubs are not decommissioned prematurely. I completely agree with that approach. There is still plenty to come from the North Sea. Oil & Gas UK estimates that there could be up to 22 thousand million barrels of oil remaining. Statoil's CEO believes that there are opportunities, as is evidenced by the company's massive investment in the 250 million barrel Mariner project—with, possibly, Bressay to follow.

Decommissioning will provide opportunities for our supply chain, but we need to think creatively if we are to maximise opportunities for Scotland while taking all steps to avoid premature cessation of production. Critical infrastructure must be protected, to stop a domino effect of fields being decommissioned unnecessarily. That means having the right businesses, with the right skills and resources, to manage late-life assets.

That in turn requires the optimum fiscal environment. We welcomed the introduction of a basin-wide investment allowance and reduction in headline rates in the March and July budgets, but that was a missed opportunity to commit to the wider fiscal reform that is needed.

To drive further reforms, decisions on fiscal policy should be underpinned by the principle of maximising economic recovery. The Scottish Government has supported the MER strategy from the start, and we argued for that approach long before the UK Government did, first in our oil and gas strategy in 2012 and then in our 2013 report "Maximising the Return from Oil and Gas in an Independent Scotland". I believe that decisions on fiscal policy should also be underpinned by the principle of MER. The MER policy will work only if

the UK explicitly commits to using its fiscal levers appropriately. Without that, the operators will simply invest elsewhere. I therefore call on the UK Government to consider ways to make that as strong a statutory commitment as possible.

There also remain a number of specific reforms that must be addressed with urgency. Ten months ago, the UK Government committed to undertake further work on the fiscal incentives for exploration, infrastructure and late-life assets, and we still await a consultation on all those issues. The OGUK economic report indicates that only seven exploration wells have been drilled in the first half of this year—a record low that underlines the urgency of incentivising exploration.

I completely agree with Statoil's chief executive, Eldar Sætre, who commented two months ago that

"it's important that the government continues to look at ways to incentivise the industry for exploration, because it all starts with exploration".

That the UK Government has delayed for 10 months is a failure, and shows lack of urgency.

We also need the correct policies to ensure that new investment happens. There is a range of existing discoveries waiting to be developed, such as Rosebank, Bentley and many others. Discoveries such as those will require a collaborative approach and the right incentives, but they will also require a stable fiscal environment, not subject to damaging tax raids like those of 2011. I therefore reiterate the call made by the First Minister in June in Aberdeen by saying that it is imperative that the UK Government commits to no tax rises during the lifetime of the UK Parliament and that any significant policy proposals are consulted on with industry and with the OGA.

Finally, innovation remains of paramount importance. I have met representatives of more than 200 innovative companies during the past five years. Last Tuesday, I launched the new Plexus wellhead system, which provides a new technological solution for deepwater high-temperature drillings. We must continue to harness that excellence and expertise.

In conclusion, the oil and gas sector in Scotland has succeeded over the past 40 years and can, with the right policies, continue to succeed over the next 40 years. The Scottish Government will continue to support it.

**The Presiding Officer:** The minister will take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak button now.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland)**

**(Lab):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement. I am glad that, like me, the minister went to the Offshore Europe conference in Aberdeen last week, and I am glad that he agreed to make a statement today. However, I am disappointed that he had so little to say today about the impact of the oil jobs crisis on the wider Scottish economy. The energy jobs task force is, of course, very welcome and I am glad that it is to continue its work, but the minister will recognise that engaging with 1,700 individuals and offering one-to-one redundancy support to 1,300 touches only the tip of the iceberg, when so many more people have already lost their jobs.

Oil & Gas UK's economic report last week estimated that there are 65,000 fewer people in the oil and gas industry and its supply chain compared with those who were employed at the start of last year. That is a scale of job losses across the UK that is comparable with the rundown of coal or steel a generation ago. Many thousands of those jobs have been lost in the north-east and many thousands more have been lost in the supply chain across Scotland, and thousands more may well be lost in the months to come.

Will the Scottish Government therefore now carry out a full assessment of the oil jobs crisis in every constituency and region of Scotland, to lay the basis for action to mitigate its economic impact? Will the Scottish Government now take action to help those businesses throughout the country that are struggling because oil and gas producers are cutting back their costs by £2 billion by the end of next year, and will ministers agree to work with supply chain companies to help them to find new markets for their products and services at home and abroad and to protect jobs throughout Scotland?

**Fergus Ewing:** The work that Dr Lena Wilson has been doing in leading the task force has achieved several things, including, as the member is aware, helping the individuals who are most directly affected. I think that it has reached out to 1,600 or 1,700 individuals at the PACE events, which have been the best-attended PACE events that there have ever been. I remind members that the success of PACE is marked, with 72 per cent of people who are made redundant finding other opportunities and jobs within six months.

We have estimated the impact, as has Oil & Gas UK—the member referred to that—and there are 6,000 direct job losses. Oil & Gas UK's estimate of the induced jobs lost is based on a calculation of 15 per cent of the total number of jobs in the sector. We absolutely accept that the downturn has had huge impacts. However, the member talks about the position of Scotland as a

whole, and we would point to the fact that the employment rate is higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. That is, in part, because of the economic strategy that is being pursued by the Scottish Government, which focuses on innovation, internationalisation, fairness and economic growth. Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Development International are delivering that work throughout Scotland day in, day out.

We are absolutely not complacent. I have outlined the main planks of work that have been achieved by Lena Wilson and the industry working together. I believe that, on the wider Scottish stage, we and our enterprise agencies have stepped up to the challenges that the Scottish economy faces, one of the major ones being the downturn in the oil price, and we have done so in a way that has been both appropriate and effective.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

**(Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement. When I learned yesterday that the statement had been scheduled, I wondered why it was being made and expected that the Scottish Government would have something new to tell us. However, having listened to the minister, I am none the wiser.

The UK Government has taken steps to help the oil and gas industry, with substantial tax changes that have been warmly welcomed by the sector and which are already paying dividends. Rather than complain about our other Government, why can the minister not tell us what new steps he will take to support jobs in the industry and the supply chain?

Scotland's Conservative member of the European Parliament, Ian Duncan, has raised in the European Parliament concerns about the impact of a new European Union-commissioned planning brief on hydrocarbon exploration and production that could add extra costs to the industry. Does the Scottish Government share those concerns? If so, what action is it taking?

**Fergus Ewing:** I am well aware of the EU's request for not a brief but a BREF—best available techniques reference document—and I have written to the UK Government indicating that we do not believe that the case has been made for the necessity of that.

Why are we here? I am making a statement today substantially because the Labour Party requested that we make a statement, and it is appropriate that the Government responds to reasonable requests that are made by Opposition parties. That is called democracy and accountability, and it is why I am here today.



Murdo Fraser is entirely wrong to say that we have nothing new to say. If he had listened more carefully to the statement, he would have heard me refer clearly to the need for the UK Government, in amending its legislation on MER UK, to ensure that, within that, there is—as I outlined in the statement—an explicit pledge on the part of the UK Government to use its fiscal levers appropriately in relation to MER.

I suggest that Murdo Fraser read Sir Ian Wood's report on MER UK. He points out that, if we do not take action to prevent premature cessation of production, especially in production hubs, the consequences for the UK Exchequer could be absolutely catastrophic. Sir Ian outlined the prize as being an additional £200 billion—admittedly, at last year's prices; equally, the penalty is exactly the same amount unless the UK Government rises to the challenge.

Murdo Fraser is an intelligent sort of guy and, once he has had the opportunity to reread my statement, he will see that it contains a very important and new reasonable call on the UK Government to work with us to maximise the economic recovery and thereby do the best possible thing to preserve and protect the supply chain and jobs in the oil and gas sector.

**The Presiding Officer:** We are extremely tight for time all afternoon, so I would appreciate it very much if we could have short questions and short answers.

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** The oil and gas industry is supported by a significant supply chain, which includes many small and medium-sized companies. What support can the Scottish Government give those businesses to enable them to take advantage of opportunities outside Scotland to support the industry across the world?

**Fergus Ewing:** Mark McDonald is exactly right. The backbone of the oil and gas industry is the several hundred small and medium-sized enterprises that are providing cutting-edge engineering, drilling and subsea solutions worldwide. I have seen that on three visits to Houston and on visits to Norway and elsewhere. The industry in Scotland is hugely respected, as Mark McDonald knows.

Scottish Enterprise, SDI and HIE help those businesses in a number of ways. First, they help them to internationalise. Secondly, they help them by providing access to global Scots—100 interviews were conducted by global Scots during my most recent visit to Houston, and they were mostly with SMEs. Thirdly, they provide an account management system, which most SMEs in the oil and gas industry that I have spoken to cannot praise highly enough, as it helps them to

open doors, to access markets and to learn from others how not to make mistakes in doing business in new locations. SE, SDI and HIE are playing a blinder in the very practical work that they do for SMEs, and long may it continue.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Given the importance of skills for the future of the industry, have any apprenticeships been lost in the industry in the wider supply chain? How many apprenticeships is the Scottish Government directly supporting? What assessment has been made of the risk that exists to the future of apprenticeships? What plans does the Scottish Government have to ensure that we have a sufficient number of apprenticeships across the industry and the supply industries?

**Fergus Ewing:** That is an extremely important issue, and we share the member's sentiments on it. We have enhanced the adopt an apprentice scheme, which was launched by SDS on 16 February. I can tell Sarah Boyack that, of the 22 apprentices who were unfortunately made redundant, 17 have already secured alternative employment. Twelve of them are being supported through the adopt an apprentice scheme and SDS is continuing to support the remaining five.

When the First Minister announced that the task force was to carry out this work, she outlined that our absolutely priority is to help apprentices. After all, there are few things more callous than the laying off of an apprentice while he or she is undertaking his or her training. To be fair to the industry, despite the difficulties, almost every business that I have met has expressed the view that the First Minister's sentiments are absolutely correct.

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** What update has the Scottish Government received about the potential production figures for the significant Clair ridge oilfield west of Shetland? Has it received an interim report on the current geological exercise regarding exploration for further potential oil finds off the west coast of Scotland and the Atlantic margins?

**Fergus Ewing:** The Clair project is one of the largest ever in Scotland. It is a giant field. According to BP, it is likely to continue in production until 2055—that is 40 years hence. It is also located in a region where there are a great many other fields, so that particular project is a terrific success story. It should also be remarked that its excellence relates to the high level of technological skill that is being brought to bear. That is a feature of a great number of the new projects.

On Chic Brodie's second question, we are of course mindful of the opportunities of new discoveries around our shores. Chic Brodie has

made a bit of a campaign of ensuring that we do not neglect to examine whatever opportunities there might be on the west coast. Perhaps through his industry, a group of leading academic experts in geology recently visited Scotland, and I engaged with them in Our Dynamic Earth, across the road from the Parliament, specifically to look at west coast opportunities. I believe that we are having an event or forum in which they can be taken forward.

Nobody thought 60 years ago that there was any oil around our shores—how wrong they were. There might well be substantial new discoveries on the west coast of Scotland.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement. Does he accept that consistent lower oil prices at levels below production costs in the North Sea put the long-term viability of oilfields, pipelines and processing at risk? Will he acknowledge the need for the industry, the UK and Scottish Governments and the Oil and Gas Authority to redouble efforts to find a range of creative solutions that extend the lifetime of the UK continental shelf oilfields and protect the thousands of jobs in the industry and the supply chain, including the very many at Sullom Voe in Shetland and at Flotta, which is in my Orkney constituency?

**Fergus Ewing:** I agree with the sentiment expressed by Liam McArthur. We cannot control the oil price, nor can the UK Government. Bob Keillor wrote a piece in *The Press and Journal* recently saying that he cannot control the oil price nor predict what it is going to be. What the industry can do is what it is doing—adapt to the challenges, reduce costs and move beyond that into attitudinal change as to how to get the best.

For example, an operator has increased wrench time by 30 to 40 per cent offshore by listening to its workforce as to how best to organise matters offshore. That is a good practical example, and it is imperative that, if the oil price is to stay around the current level, the industry responds to that change. The impression that I got in Aberdeen was that it is indeed responding to that change and viewing matters positively, although there are still very serious challenges ahead in the next year or so.

**Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP):** Can the minister expand on what he said in his statement on the work of the energy jobs task force and say what work it is doing and what work it expects to do in the near future?

**Fergus Ewing:** Yes, I can. The task force is chaired by Dr Lena Wilson and has met monthly since it was formed. It has reached out to a huge number of people within the industry. The report to which I alluded earlier, which will be published

shortly, will highlight case studies of people who have found jobs as a direct result of the work that the task force has done.

The task force is also looking at balanced messaging because it is necessary to promote, as Mr Robertson most certainly does, the truth that this is an industry that has a very successful future ahead of it as well as an extremely successful past. The task force is aiming to do that as well, as indeed am I in these statements.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** We join the Scottish Government in supporting further tax incentives for the industry. However, has the minister done any analysis of cost? If so, will he publish it? Given that the tax revenue from oil is at an all-time low and much less than the Scottish National Party assumed in its white paper, will the minister tell us how much tax he is prepared to forgo to help the industry?

**Fergus Ewing:** I am very pleased to hear that the official Labour position is that we should recognise the reduction of costs as a requirement for the oil and gas industry. I was not in a state of entire certainty about that, in light of the election at the weekend of the new Labour leader, who I believe previously expressed the view that the industry should be nationalised. If there were to be any mention of that, the future of the exploration and production companies, which is challenged at the moment, would be dire indeed.

What I can say regarding the cost of tax measures is this: although it pays in effect for 78 per cent of the cost of exploration, the exploration tax credit system that Norway brought in, and which led to the discovery of the 1.8-billion-barrel Johan Sverdrup field, has brought in several billion pounds extra. In other words, the right tax regime does not cost: it brings in revenue. That is why Norway has an oil and gas fund that is in excess of £500 billion, while the UK has an oil fund of zero.

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):** I was also at the Offshore Europe conference last week. I am happy to report that there are a lot of new things happening in the industry.

Does the minister agree that the oil and gas workforce is very much getting younger, that a lot more women are now in senior positions and that everyone at Offshore Europe was becoming confident that the industry will come out of its present challenges leaner, more resilient and more diverse than ever before?

**Fergus Ewing:** Yes. I have been keen to try in every possible way to promote gender equality within the oil and gas industry, and I have attended many events with that purpose in mind. There is an organisation of females who work within the oil and gas industry. Of course only a

relatively small minority of the jobs are actually offshore, but females work offshore and do the job just as well as males.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to restate that. We will continue to press for progress. After all, some say that the oil and gas industry continues to neglect around one half of the population far too often.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I am grateful for the advance copy of the statement, and I am surprised that it contains no hint of recognition of the downsides of the fossil fuel industry—neither the environmental destruction that it is driving nor the economic vulnerability that comes from our overreliance on an unsustainable industry.

Honestly, how can the minister come to Parliament with a statement titled “Future Prosperity for the North Sea” and have literally not one word to say about the transition to marine renewables, which can generate prosperity without destroying the life support system that we all depend upon?

**Fergus Ewing:** That is because the statement is about the oil and gas industry. If Mr Harvie cares to come along this evening or on Thursday, he can hear me talk about the renewables industry.

I know that Mr Harvie is very passionate about fossil fuels, and we know his position. I must admit that I was surprised to see that there seems to be some difference of opinion within the Green Party: I have read that Mr Robin Harper apparently thinks that there are circumstances in which hydraulic fracturing would be a good idea. While we see a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in Scotland, we see political fracturing within the Green Party.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** In planning for the future, it surely is important that the minister today gives details of how the Scottish Government is working specifically to support the development of transferable skills for marine renewables and wind turbines for when the oil rigs are finally decommissioned, in order to ensure that those opportunities go to Scottish workers. I believe that we should be seeing a plan now.

**Fergus Ewing:** We recognise that workers, whether from Scotland or other parts of the world, are welcome to play a part, although obviously our efforts are on people who live in Scotland, and that is the objective to which our efforts are primarily devoted.

With regard to the offshore wind industry, of course we support it. We have left no stone unturned in doing so. We hope that Beatrice, Moray, Inch Cape, Seagreen and Neart Na Gaoithe will go ahead. Sadly, the power for that

rests entirely with the UK Government. Instead of seeing progress with the electricity market reform in the announcement of the second round of strike prices, and instead of seeing an energy policy that goes beyond 2020, what we have seen is dithering, delay, prevarication and what appears to be an out-and-out attack on renewables by the UK Government.

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** In his statement, the minister talked about maximising economic recovery. Can he tell us what expectations he has that we will see a UK policy on that subject any time soon? How is he going to help?

**Fergus Ewing:** I hesitate to speak for the UK Government—I am not sure that I would be its anointed spokesperson—but it is abundantly clear to anyone who has studied Sir Ian Wood’s final report, which I have with me and parts of which I have reread in the past couple of days, that there is one fundamental truth that the UK Government has not acknowledged. That is that, if we are to achieve the objective of maximising economic recovery, the UK Government must step up to its role of using fiscal policy as a lever—nay, a precision tool—to get the maximum from the North Sea.

The UK Government must therefore make a commitment in the Energy Bill or the Infrastructure Bill, which are currently going through the UK Parliament, to do that. It has not done so yet, but I hope that, after this statement, it will begin to think very seriously. If it does not collaborate, why should it expect industry to collaborate? That is what it is asking.

We will pursue that argument vigorously with our MPs in Westminster and in Scotland so that we achieve the best for the industry and thereby secure tens of thousands of jobs in this country.

**The Presiding Officer:** I give my apologies to the two members whom I simply could not call, as we need to move on to the next item of business.

## Refugees

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-14245, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on responding to the global refugee crisis. I remind all members that we are extremely tight for time all afternoon.

14:36

**The Minister for Europe and International Development (Humza Yousaf):** Like many here, I have been moved to tears twice in as many weeks, and for very different reasons. First, a person would have to have a heart of stone not to be deeply moved by the image of Alan Kurdi's body washed up on a beach in Turkey. All of us here will have desperately tried to hold back from wandering into the realms of "what if?": what if that had not been Alan Kurdi's body, but that of one of our own children; what if it had been that of our nephew, niece, grandchild or godchild? How would any of us possibly have coped?

The second time that I was reduced to tears was for a very different reason: joy. At the weekend, I joined thousands of others across Scotland at vigils to show solidarity with refugees who are fleeing conflict and persecution across the world. I have seen some really amazing things in George Square in my lifetime, but I never suspected that I would see the day when people would come out in droves to demand that their Government provide safety to refugees in Scotland and across the United Kingdom. Everybody who attended the vigils should be applauded for showing such solidarity. That display of common humanity was a beautiful spectacle. It was a reminder that, despite how difficult things can get or seem, we should never allow ourselves to wallow in a pit of despair. It is often in the darkest of times that the light of human kindness shines through.

The death of Alan Kurdi may have acted as a wake-up call to the world to take notice of a crisis on a global scale. However, the terrible reality is that he was one of many thousands—men, women and children—who have perished making the perilous journey from war-torn Syria to the safety of Europe.

The crisis is not new. It has not happened suddenly; it has been going on for years. A war has raged in Syria for more than four years. The loss of life has been utterly appalling, and the devastation of homes and communities has led to an exodus of refugees. Very few of us will have seen such an exodus in our lifetime.

Let me deliberately use the word "refugees" again. The idea that those who are fleeing Syria

are immigrants or even purely economic migrants is as laughable as it is ridiculous. The belief that parents would risk their lives and their children's lives for social security or a food bank voucher is warped and not one that the Scottish Government accepts.

Much of the focus has rightly been on the plight of Syrian refugees. More than 4 million Syrians are now registered as refugees in countries that neighbour Syria, and more than 8 million are now internally displaced. As we have seen so graphically, many thousands have undertaken a desperate and dangerous journey to try to reach the safety of Europe. Perhaps war in the middle east and elsewhere in the world used to seem very far away from us—and perhaps at one time it was. The pictures of desperate people arriving across southern Europe bring the consequences of that war much closer to home.

Last week, President Juncker of the European Commission was right when he said that we in Europe

"needed to remember that Europe has had its own refugee crises in the past with people fleeing from war, persecution, especially during the conflicts of the last century".

The Scottish Government has been calling on the UK Government to accept more refugees from Syria for more than two years. I and other ministers have consistently and regularly raised the issue with UK Government ministers and pressed for more to be done. We have always made it clear that Scotland would play its part in accepting more refugees from the conflict.

On 4 September, the First Minister hosted a summit to set out Scotland's response to the unfolding humanitarian tragedy in southern Europe. Before the summit, the First Minister wrote again to the Prime Minister, urging him to sign up to the European Union's proposals on the relocation of refugees and refugee resettlement to enable the UK to take its fair share of people fleeing persecution and conflict. We should look to the contribution made by other countries across Europe of similar size and economic equivalence. Germany, for example, has taken more refugees in one weekend than the UK is proposing to take over five years.

The summit brought together stakeholders from the refugee community, local authorities, the third sector and other representatives of civic Scotland in a positive and productive environment to discuss the situation and what Scotland can do to help. We heard extremely powerful testimony from people who have escaped war and persecution and sought sanctuary here in Scotland. They talked of how they had been welcomed in Scotland and also about the practicalities of settling in a new country.

I was particularly pleased that the summit attracted cross-party support and again express my thanks and the thanks of the Government for the attendance at the summit of all the party leaders from across the chamber.

Following the summit, the Prime Minister finally announced last week that the UK Government would accept 20,000 refugees in an expansion of the existing Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme over the next five years.

Back in January 2014, the Scottish Government welcomed the establishment of the VPR scheme, and we are pleased that more than a quarter of the refugees—55 out of the 216—who have arrived under the scheme have come to Scotland and been welcomed by Glasgow City Council.

Although the expansion of the scheme is extremely welcome, we believe that the UK must do more than that.

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** Does the minister agree with me in rejecting the suggestion that we should be deterring people from coming here? There can be no greater deterrent than the hundreds of thousands of people who have died in the Mediterranean Sea as a result of making that dangerous crossing. It is nonsense to talk about creating a deterrent in this country.

**Humza Yousaf:** Yes, I accept that point, which Willie Rennie makes well. Also, I say to those who have suggested that having search and rescue facilities in the Mediterranean is a pull factor that the evidence has shown that that is not the case.

The figure of 20,000 refugees over five years should not be seen as a cap or an upper limit. The Scottish Government believes that the UK should play its part in responding to the crisis on the southern European coast.

As for Scotland, the figure of 1,000 refugees that was mentioned by the First Minister on Friday 4 September was a response to how many refugees we should immediately be ready to accept. It should in no way be seen as a limit or an upper cap. Let me be clear: whatever figure the UK Government proposes, we in Scotland are prepared to take—and will take—a proportionate share.

We understand that the UK Government wishes to take only people living in refugee camps in countries surrounding Syria. However, we believe that the scheme must be extended to include those in Europe so that the UK can play its part in tackling the immediate problems on our doorstep.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to play a co-ordinated part in the European approach to asylum. Following the First Minister's summit, Scotland's practical

response to the crisis is being co-ordinated by an operational task force, whose second meeting I chaired this morning. The task force is urgently engaging with organisations across Scotland to establish capacity across the range of key services that will ensure that refugees coming to Scotland will be able to integrate successfully.

Local authorities are crucial to the successful integration of refugees into our communities. The task force has heard about the overwhelming and unprecedented response from local authorities, with the majority of councils indicating a willingness to accommodate refugees from the current crisis. I pay tribute to their positive and generous response, which we will build on to ensure that the appropriate support and integration services are put in place.

The task force is also examining how Scotland can harness the enormous good will and offers of help from members of the public. Humanitarian organisations and the Scottish Government have received a huge number of offers of practical help from individuals and groups across the country.

The task force today launched an online hub to signpost members of the public to information about how they can donate or register their willingness to help refugees in other ways, such as befriending, teaching English as a second language or providing other integration support. The website is [www.scotlandwelcomesrefugees.scot](http://www.scotlandwelcomesrefugees.scot) and I encourage every member to look it up and share it across their social media networks. As members will be aware, the Scottish Government has allocated an initial £1 million to support the work of the task force in the practical preparation of services and support across Scotland to deal with the arrival of refugees. Further support will be considered as the task force progresses its work.

It should be recognised that Scotland has a long experience of welcoming refugees. We have a history of refugee resettlement. Over the past 20 years, refugees from Bosnia, Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have found a new home in Scotland through resettlement programmes and have been able to rebuild their lives here.

**Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** I visited the Scottish Refugee Council on Friday and met a number of refugee women in Glasgow. Their big request of the Government is for early support for language development, particularly English-speaking skills. Can the minister share with the Parliament information on any specific support that the Scottish Government could offer in that regard?

**Humza Yousaf:** I think that I know the group of women that the member met, because yesterday I

also met them. We will absolutely look to see how we can support English as a second language and teaching English immediately. In fact, as part of the vulnerable person relocation scheme, some funding is secured specifically for teaching English. English is a route into employment and education, and therefore the task force will examine that.

Scotland has well-established structures in place for integrating those who come here to seek asylum. In particular, Glasgow City Council has enormous expertise through its role in asylum dispersal over the years and its participation in the Syrian VPR scheme. Other local authorities have experience of a number of other refugee resettlement schemes. Scotland has a dedicated refugee integration strategy—"New Scots: Integrating Refugees in Scotland's Communities"—which is now nearly two years old.

It is important that we do not kid ourselves. All members here have knocked on enough doors in their lifetimes to know that there still exist plenty of negative attitudes towards refugees and those seeking asylum. We will have to work hand in glove with local communities, and we will have to do work on getting integration, which is of course a two-way process, right from the very start.

With our focus on Scotland and refugee resettlement here, we must not forget or lose sight of the millions of refugees who remain in camps around the world.

**Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):** Before the minister moves on to those who are located elsewhere, perhaps he could answer the question that I have today written to the First Minister to ask. Will Scots who wish to open their homes to refugees who come to this country require disclosure checks and, if so, will the resources be made available to Disclosure Scotland to ensure that there are no delays in the process?

**Humza Yousaf:** I am sure that the First Minister will reply to that letter, but the priority and the desire are to ensure that refugees are resettled in social housing and housing association housing. That will be the task force's immediate priority. Those who are resettled with families—they might be unaccompanied children—will be with people who have already been disclosure checked, such as registered foster parents. Those are some of the issues that are being examined. If there is a need for disclosure checks, the task force can certainly explore that.

On the international humanitarian crisis and the needs of those in the camps, the Scottish Government allocated money to the Disasters Emergency Committee in 2013. However, the end of the conflict in Syria is not in sight. It is worth

giving credit to the UK Government for the generous donations that it has made in overseas aid to Syria and refugee camps in the surrounding area. The Scottish Government, guided by the operational task force, will explore what more it can do.

This is a global humanitarian crisis, which requires a global response. There are no easy solutions, but we all have a responsibility as human beings to recognise the extent of the crisis and do something about it—doing nothing is simply not an option. The overwhelming support from across Scotland over the past two weeks, from the Scottish people, local authorities and the third sector, shows our willingness to help the most vulnerable in the world. To paraphrase President Juncker again, we have not forgotten that there is a reason why there are more MacDonalds living in the United States than the entire population of Scotland. We, as a nation, have to step up and respond in a way that matches the scale of the crisis.

I have the best job—and the best-kept secret—in the Government: I get to sell Scotland across the world. In that role, I am often asked what I want Scotland to be known for. It is quite simple. I do not want Scotland to be known as the wealthiest country in the world, as nice as that may be. I do not want us to be known for our military might, as important as our defences are. If there is one thing that I want our nation to be known for, let it be as the most compassionate country in the world, so that, when history judges us on how we responded to the humanitarian crisis, and history will judge us, our future generations will look back and say that, when the world needed leadership, courage and compassion, Scotland—all of us together—stood at the front of the queue and did not cower away in the background.

I pledge once again that Scotland will leave no stone unturned. We will do everything that we can to help refugees. We will not forget Alan Kurdi and all the lost lives that he represents. We will not walk on by.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the severity of the global refugee crisis and calls for a coordinated international humanitarian response; acknowledges the contribution of the UK Government to the humanitarian needs of those in the refugee camps bordering Syria and the commitment to take 20,000 Syrian refugees from these camps by 2020; calls on the UK Government to increase the numbers it will accept, coordinate with its European partners and take its fair share of the refugees arriving in the EU; welcomes the cross-party summit on the refugee crisis and the establishment of the taskforce to coordinate Scotland's response, which has been aided by £1 million from the Scottish Government; further welcomes the overwhelming public response to the crisis, the generosity of spirit being demonstrated across Scotland and the positive response of

local government, the third sector and communities, and commits to ensuring that those arriving in Scotland will be given a warm and positive welcome and that Scotland will take a fair share of refugees.

14:50

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I thank the Scottish Government for bringing the debate to the chamber and for lodging a motion that we can, I hope, unite behind. I confirm that we will support the Government's motion. The debate is another opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to speak with one voice on the crisis; I hope that we do so.

We have already heard many moving speeches on the refugee crisis, including from the First Minister, Kezia Dugdale and Patricia Ferguson. The harrowing scenes that we have witnessed over the past few weeks and months have not been the beginning of the crisis, and I appreciate the opportunity that we had before recess to speak in Alex Rowley's members' business debate on the Mediterranean crisis.

The heartbreaking pictures of Alan Kurdi were the beginning of the public demand for action, which forced a welcome rethink of the UK Government's position. The actions that the Government has taken—to increase the number of refugees that the UK will accept, to create a new ministerial post and to financially support refugee camps—are all welcome, but they are not enough. Those measures are all highlighted in John Lamont's amendment and although I acknowledge the UK Government's contribution, I have concerns about the choice of the word "sustainable". We are in a crisis and need to ensure that our response matches that.

Even the pictures of Alan, the refugees marching down the motorway and the refrigerated lorry at the side of the road failed to fully express the sheer scale of the crisis. A report that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees published in June stated that one human in every 122 is now a refugee, is seeking asylum or is internally displaced. Fifty three per cent of all refugees come from three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. More than 4 million Syrians have left their homes in search of safety and a further 6 million have been internally displaced. That is the scale of the crisis.

The crisis has been with us for some time. The Scottish Government has made representation to the UK Government calling for action. In our manifesto for the general election, Labour made a direct commitment to

"ensure Britain continues its proud history of providing refuge for those fleeing persecution by upholding our international obligations, including working with the UN to support vulnerable refugees from Syria."

Yvette Cooper deserves credit for her work at Westminster on the refugee crisis and for trying to change the position of a UK Government that has, at times, proved to be reluctant to take action beyond the aid packages that it has sent to the region. I am pleased that she will now head a Labour task force on refugees.

I am also pleased that the UK Government has finally promised to meet our moral obligation to accommodate more refugees in Britain. However, although 20,000 over the duration of the current UK Parliament is welcome, it is not enough. We need to do more; the crisis is now. At this stage, we do not know whether the number will be front loaded, as has been requested by humanitarian charities, which understand the situation on the ground far better than any politician in the UK. The Refugee Council has stated:

"The programme needs to be frontloaded as the crisis is now and the expansion must happen as a matter of urgency as people are living in desperate situations in the region and cannot wait until 2020 to reach safety."

It is also wrong that the Prime Minister has ruled out helping those who have already reached Europe but who still need accommodation and our help. We have seen the struggles that face Greece and Italy, which are in an impossible situation, and the negative reaction of countries such as Hungary, where fences have been erected to keep refugees out. We have also seen the contrast with Germany, which has made a huge contribution in offering asylum. However, it cannot do that alone. Our moral obligation must be extended to helping those who have felt it appropriate to risk their lives by making the dangerous journey to Europe.

The UK Government's theory that taking refugees only from Syria and its neighbouring countries will prevent people from attempting to make the journey to Europe bears a remarkable resemblance to the theory that stopping search and rescue in the Mediterranean would mean that the boats would no longer come. This theory, too, will fail to match reality: people will still make the journey, and many of them will tragically die. We must work to ensure that there are safe and legal routes from overseas and that those who make the journey across the Mediterranean are treated with humanity.

Their number currently includes some 3,000 unaccompanied children, who are here without a mother or father. There can be no argument—political or moral—that concludes that those children do not deserve our help simply because they survived the gruelling and life-threatening trip to Europe. History has shown that Britain has been ready and willing to act in the past. In the lead-up to the second world war, 10,000 Jewish children arrived in this country. That was the right

thing to do then; with 3,000 unaccompanied children in Europe now, it is again the right thing to do.

Save the Children is calling for a key campaign in that respect, and it has set out a five-point plan for Government action. The Scottish Refugee Council highlights in its briefing that we need an appropriate response to the increasing numbers of vulnerable women and children who are fleeing. We need clarity on what will happen, once they reach the age of 18, to children who come here. We must ensure that, when people look back at this point in history, Britain is not found wanting.

The UK Government has moved only under pressure. The increase in the number of refugees to 20,000 came not in the immediate aftermath of the publication of the pictures of Alan; it was announced only when it became apparent that the picture that was on the front page of most newspapers was beginning to change the mood of the country. That, along with pressure from the Opposition, is what has caused the Government's U-turn.

On the refugee crisis, the UK Government has been reacting rather than leading. It must reconsider its refusal to participate in the EU reallocation scheme, and it is important that we as a Parliament continue to apply pressure on it on that issue. A joint letter that was sent last November by charities including Oxfam and the Refugee Council stated:

"While we applaud Britain's generous aid contribution to the crisis, it is clear that aid alone is not enough. Syria's neighbours are struggling under the weight of this unprecedented crisis and it is time we stopped asking of them what we are not doing ourselves."

The choices that are open to us should not involve either only delivering aid or only accommodating refugees—our response needs to include both. We have seen poignant images of public support from Glasgow and Edinburgh at the weekend—the minister spoke about George Square—and a number of local campaign groups have sprung up throughout the country. That is something of which we, as a country, can be proud.

Following Labour's calls for Britain to take at least 10,000 refugees, I was pleased that the Scottish Government confirmed that it is willing to take 1,000 as its fair share, and that that is a starting point and not a cap. Now that the UK Government has confirmed that it will take 20,000 refugees, I welcome the Scottish Government's confirmation—not that I ever doubted it—that it will continue to take its fair share, which will now be 2,000 refugees. Is the Scottish Government able to say whether there is a way in which it can front load the numbers of refugees who will come to Scotland so that we can give help where it is most

needed? Has the minister had any discussions with the UK Government and local authorities on increasing the initial calls to take 1,000 refugees? Will the fair share of 2,000 still not be considered a cap?

Scotland has led the UK in our reaction to the refugee crisis and we must continue to do more. I very much welcome the minister's comments in his speech. I also ask the Scottish Government how discussions with councils have been progressing. Is the Government aware how many refugees are able to settle in each area? What resources, if any, from either the Scottish Government or the UK Government will be at councils' disposal?

The Scottish Refugee Council has emphasised the importance of a national co-ordinated response allowing for the reduction of transitional costs, and it has called for a national reception centre. Perhaps the minister can, in closing, respond to those points.

Certainly, the number of refugees that we will welcome into Scotland is only the beginning; we must also look at how we integrate them into our society long term. Will the Scottish Government task force consider that important aspect of the crisis, and will it consider publishing a plan to set out how it will achieve integration?

Organisations such as the Fife Migrants Forum are well placed to support integration, but they need support for resources such as translators and volunteers—including financial support—as soon as possible.

As our amendment to the Government's motion highlights, there are already positive measures being taken. The University of Glasgow, for example, must be congratulated for the action that it has taken in supporting refugee students by offering fee waivers. It has also extended its talent sponsorship scheme and is accommodating two Syrian academics as PhD students. I encourage other universities, colleges and businesses to look at that example and to think about how they can do the same. I hope that that can be achieved, with support from the Scottish Government.

For many refugees, their studies have been disrupted, their jobs and trades lost and their careers halted by the crisis. That, too, is something that we can help to tackle. We must offer people sanctuary and, when the time comes, if they wish—many will—to return to their home countries ensure that they are equipped with the skills and talents that will benefit their economy, their culture and their country in the future. Let us not give refugees in Scotland just a home; let us give them hope for the future. That is an achievement that we should all be working towards.



I move amendment S4M-14245.2, to insert at end:

“; notes the positive measures that the University of Glasgow has taken to support refugee students by offering fee waivers, extending its Talent Scholarship programme and accommodating two Syrian academics as PhD students, and encourages other universities to explore opportunities, with support from the Scottish Government, to offer places to students whose studies have been interrupted and whose education could benefit their home country in the future”.

15:00

**John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** The whole country has been deeply moved by the on-going humanitarian crisis in Syria and north Africa. The heartbreaking coverage of desperate families and children trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe demonstrates the plight of thousands fleeing their homes because of violence.

It is very difficult for us here truly to understand what those people are going through and what it is really like for people to have to flee their homes for fear of their lives and the lives of their families, or to witness their country being torn apart by brutal civil war.

Although emotions are, understandably, running high and we are all distressed by what is happening, we must use our heads as well as our hearts when deciding on the best and most effective response to this increasingly complex crisis.

Britain has a long and proud record of assisting those who are in need and it is a record that must continue. Over the past decade, the United Kingdom has been the second-largest Government provider of humanitarian assistance. Britain is the only major country in the world that has kept the promise to spend 0.7 per cent of its gross domestic product on aid. It is simply wrong to say that the UK has stood by and done nothing to help Syria in recent years.

Over the past few months, the crew on HMS Bulwark have been working hard in the Mediterranean and have transported 6,700 people to safety. Britain is the second-largest bilateral donor of aid during the Syrian conflict. A further £100 million that was recently announced takes the total contribution to more than £1 billion, which is the UK's largest-ever response to a humanitarian crisis. Let us look at what that money represents. It is being used to provide more than 18 million food rations, to give 1.6 million people access to clean water and to provide education for a quarter of a million children. More than half of that new funding will support children, with particular priority for those who have been orphaned or separated from their families.

No other European country has matched that level of support. Without the UK's aid to refugee camps, the number of refugees attempting the dangerous journey to Europe would undoubtedly be much higher. On the specific point about taking in refugees, the UK is also acting. Sanctuary has already been provided to more than 5,000 Syrians in Britain and a specific resettlement scheme has been introduced, alongside those that are already in place, to help the Syrian refugees who are particularly at risk.

The Prime Minister has announced that a further 20,000 refugees will be given safety in the UK and that a new Government minister will be responsible for co-ordinating the delivery of that policy.

We have seen the Scottish Government, councils, boarding schools, churches and individuals come forward to express their willingness to help. That reflects the wider generosity and care that has been shown by families and communities across Scotland and the United Kingdom.

In my area, in the Scottish Borders, I am proud that residents are doing what they can to help. They include April Humble from Lilliesleaf, who is travelling to the island of Kos to help, in person, refugees who are arriving there.

I am fully aware there has been disagreement between my party and others about the correct approach to this difficult crisis.

**Humza Yousaf:** I agree with much of what John Lamont has said. He mentioned a constituent who is travelling to the island of Kos. I have been moved by the number of people who are travelling to Kos, Lesbos and other places. Does he agree that that demonstrates that there is a crisis in Europe? Will he urge his colleagues in the UK Government at least to explore getting involved in resettlement of refugees from Europe, just as his constituent is helping out people on the southern European coast?

**John Lamont:** There is undoubtedly a crisis across Europe, which will define how Europe moves forward. Britain is playing its part in European efforts to deal with the crisis. The Prime Minister has said clearly, as I am trying to do today, how the Conservatives believe is the best way to deal with that.

The Germans set out their position. We have already seen today, over the past few hours, that their position has changed remarkably in the light of the changing and very challenging position that is emerging in Europe.

Some of the language that has been used in this discussion over the past few days has been unhelpful. It is unfair to accuse the UK

Government of lacking compassion based purely on the number of people who will be allowed to stay in the United Kingdom.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Will John Lamont give way?

**John Lamont:** It is correct that the UK is taking in more refugees, but that is only part of the solution to an increasingly difficult and desperate humanitarian crisis.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will John Lamont give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):** The member is not giving way.

**John Lamont:** More than 11 million people have been driven from their homes, fleeing the terror of Assad and Islamic State. According to the United Nations, by the end of last year, more than 60 million people had been forcibly driven from their own homes. Given that number of people, this is not a problem that Scotland and the United Kingdom can hope to solve themselves, for Syria or beyond. This is about meeting humanitarian responsibilities and doing all that we can to help those who are most in need.

That is why it is absolutely right that we should be prioritising the people who are in camps just outside Syria. Those who have already made the dangerous journey to the EU are, arguably, in a relatively safe place already, compared to the higher number of people who are left in refugee camps and who are displaced internally within Syria. By providing safety to those who are in Turkey, Jordan and the rest of that region—and crucially, by providing safe passage from there to the United Kingdom—we will stop more refugees getting on dangerous boats.

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):** Will John Lamont give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is just closing.

**John Lamont:** That approach balances the need to give sanctuary to a greater number of people while at the same time trying to dissuade vulnerable families from undertaking that dangerous journey across open seas.

I accept that the UK Government should look closely at the number of people that it is taking in to this country, but we must face the fact that simply taking in more people is not the solution to the crisis.

In Syria, we need a comprehensive solution that deals with the people who are most responsible for the terrible scenes that we see: President Assad, the butchers of Islamic State and the criminal gangs that are running the terrible trade in people.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, Mr Lamont.

**John Lamont:** We need a solution that helps to stabilise countries from where refugees are coming. That should be a priority for Europe and America in the coming months.

I move amendment S4M-14245.1, to insert after “EU”:

“; welcomes the appointment of a UK Government minister to coordinate the delivery of this commitment; notes that the UK’s response has been further boosted by an extra £100 million in aid, taking the total contribution to the Syrian refugee crisis to over £1 billion, which is the UK’s largest response to a humanitarian crisis; notes that, while taking in a sustainable level of refugees is important, tackling the root causes of this crisis must be a priority for world leaders”.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I turn to the open debate. I am afraid that we are very short of time, so I ask for speeches of a maximum of six minutes, which might have to change later in the debate.

15:07

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** There are many times in the chamber when we wish that we did not have to debate something. This is certainly one of those times, when we see the images that we have seen and meet the people who are trying to survive in this horrific crisis.

I thank the minister and the task force for answering the pleas of many constituents—everyone’s constituents throughout Scotland, not just in my area—by putting forward a co-ordinated approach to the crisis. The launch of the website provides a direct contact for everyone, which is absolutely fantastic as the groups have been asking for it. When people make contact through the website, will they be directed to loading bays—collection points—where they can unload the things that they have gathered in? Will they get help with transport to take goods to those sites?

As human beings, we have a moral duty to help those fleeing the global refugee crisis. Sixty million people are displaced from their homes—half of whom are women and girls, believe it or not—and 30 per cent of the world’s refugees are residing in Pakistan, Lebanon and Turkey, and yet, as we have heard before, the UK Government has said that it will take 20,000 refugees from Syrian camps by 2020, which is in five years. As others have said, that is just not good enough.

We should not be taking only those who are in the camps but the terrified people who have risked their lives, their children’s lives and their family’s lives fleeing violence and persecution. Why would people try to do that if they were not absolutely terrified for their life? Why are they any less to be

saved than the people who are already in the camps?

As the minister has already said to his UK counterparts, they have to rethink their plan. They have to take people who are lying in terrible suffering. We should look at what is happening in Hungary, too—imagine it was any of us or our relatives. As McIlvanney once said, we are a land of mongrels. We in Scotland all have immigration in our past and we have a moral duty to ensure that we take as many people as possible out of the terrible situation that they are in at the moment.

I agree absolutely with the last sentence in the Conservative amendment, which says:

“while taking in a sustainable level of refugees is important, tackling the root causes of this crisis must be a priority for world leaders”.

Of course it must be, but I remind the chamber and people outside it that the west has a moral obligation to the refugees. Many years ago, some of the dictators that John Lamont mentioned were friends of the west. We must look at what is happening in the middle east. Governments in the west have a responsibility to help people there. Yes, absolutely, we must get to the root causes, but we should look at the root causes as human beings, as well as elected politicians.

That will take a long time, but the refugees do not have time. We must help them as best we can. Everyone has a different idea about what the root causes are—I know what mine is; it might be different from others’. When we get to the bottom of the root causes, we need to ensure that conflicts in the middle east—which is basically where the problems are all happening—are resolved to the benefit of the people, not some Government and certainly not the arms trade, which I feel very strongly about.

I turn to the Labour amendment, which mentions the University of Glasgow. I was there at the freshers fair today, where such a lot of good work is going on. I met people from Mary’s Meals and many others who are helping with the refugee crisis. I must mention a couple of other people in my constituency. Margaret Woods from the Glasgow campaign to welcome refugees leaves for Lesbos on Thursday. Travelling with Margaret is Pinar Asku, who was a refugee at Dungavel—look at what she is doing now. Amal Azzudin, who is one of the Glasgow girls and a graduate of Glasgow university, is also going. They are going to help.

I should also mention Glasgow university’s support for Syrian refugees, which, I understand, was kick-started by Fiona Hyslop a number of years ago. Allison Phipps has done loads of work with GRAMNet—the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network—to put forward the case

for refugees. Finally, I should mention all the ordinary groups and people throughout Scotland who are helping as much as they can: from people who were in George Square in Glasgow, people who are collecting and people who are opening up their houses to refugees. Hugh Henry asked a good question on that issue—people have asked me about what will have to be done.

This is great debate. We must remember that refugees are human beings and we are human beings. We have a moral obligation to ensure that they can live a peaceful and happy life. We do not just need to bring refugees here; we need to look at the long-term conflict and ensure that people, not certain Governments, get what they deserve.

15:13

**Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab):** Since the issue was raised at First Minister’s question time two weeks ago, the UK Government has made a welcome change to its policy on accepting refugees from Syria. It did so because of mounting public opinion and real anger in this country that our Government’s response was so inadequate.

That the number of refugees that the Tory Government has promised to take has risen to 20,000 over five years is indeed welcome news. What is still extremely disappointing is that number is so low and that the Government has refused to offer resettlement to refugees who are already in Europe or to participate in the EU’s proposed refugee resettlement and relocation schemes.

I welcome the UK Government’s financial support for aid to the region, but I fundamentally disagree with its approach to refugees. It says that it wants to help those who are most vulnerable and that that is why over five years it will take 20,000 people from the region. However, the point that the Government seems to miss is that to be Syrian today is to be vulnerable. Many Syrians who have made it to Europe are extremely vulnerable indeed. I will return to that point later.

I do not intend to repeat the statistics that we have already heard, as that would add nothing to the debate. However, I will say that, as we have heard, it is estimated that the number of refugees from Syria will reach 4.27 million by the end of the year, and Lebanon already has the largest refugee population in the world, with 1.5 million in a country with a population of only 4.5 million.

It is hard to imagine what life must be like in Lebanon for Syrians or the native population. At the weekend, I heard reports that the United Nations Children’s Fund is running out of money to be able to support refugees in Lebanon. Not all of them are in camps; some live in shanty towns and

elsewhere. The money to help them is simply no longer there, because of the scale of the problem.

As we know, the politics of Lebanon are fragile. We must do more to support it and its neighbours, who are on the front line in this situation, particularly if we want to avoid further humanitarian tragedies in the region.

David Cameron must give a lead and not allow his party's fear of the issue of immigration to colour his response to a humanitarian disaster. We are one of the wealthiest countries in the world and we cannot shirk our responsibility.

Earlier, I spoke of the most vulnerable of refugees and the fact that the UK Government has said that it will accept 20,000 of them into our country. I now want to focus on a group of vulnerable people who will not be offered help by the UK Government: the children who have made their way alone to Europe.

So far this year, approximately a quarter of those making that dangerous journey and seeking refuge in Europe have been children. Unaccompanied children are at the greatest risk of all refugees and migrants. Many of them are already in Europe and are travelling alone without family support. They face particular dangers such as abuse and exploitation. Aid agencies are calling on the UK to recognise their particular plight and their particular vulnerability and to offer some of them a home. I echo that call.

More than a year ago, in a speech about Syria, I made the point that there was a real danger that an entire generation of young Syrians might be deprived of an education. Since then, the situation for those young people has worsened beyond our understanding. These are the young people who now find themselves in Europe, often alone. We owe them a chance to fulfil their potential, to realise their ambitions and to contribute to the success of our local communities and our country. If we need examples of how to integrate people into our society, we need look no further than the Maryhill integration network, which I know that you are familiar with, Presiding Officer. Its work in that area is remarkable.

To their credit, most of Scotland's local authorities have offered their help in this crisis, and Glasgow is no exception. My city has a proud record of assisting refugees and asylum seekers to settle and make their homes among us, and it was a privilege to be able to join so many of my fellow citizens at the vigil in George Square on Saturday. However, our local authorities will need support to allow them to do the job as well as they can. Help to support our health and social services and our schools will be needed. For example, 134 languages are spoken in Glasgow's schools and we must ensure that the support is in place to

manage the practical difficulties that such challenges present.

Support for and from the housing association movement will also be required. I know that the Wheatley Group has already offered help, which is welcome, but I am aware that Mr Dornan has been closely involved in that issue and might want to speak about that later, so I will not dwell on the point.

John Lamont was absolutely right when he said that we can look back with pride on the way in which our country has welcomed refugees from around the world in times of crisis. We have to ask ourselves how future generations will judge us. My fear is that they will judge us harshly. I very much hope that the UK Government will reverse its policies on bringing refugees to this country and will ensure that that fine tradition of hospitality and openness continues in the coming months.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I make a plea to members to keep their speeches to six minutes so that we do not have to cut members' time later.

15:19

**Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD):** In this debate we are sending a pretty powerful message, not just to the UK Government, which has been a focus of the debate, but to the public and to people who are seeking refuge, safety and freedom in this country. The message is: Scotland is ready and willing to take our share of people and to support people who are in difficulties.

People tell me that they are keen to contribute in any way that they can do. I have had emails, as I am sure that other members have done, from a variety of people who want to step up and help. Co-ordinating the response will be a considerable job, because contributions are coming in from across society.

Some responses in Scotland have been extraordinary, but the most extraordinary response has been that of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who has really stepped up. She has accepted huge numbers of people, including people who have been stuck in Hungary. When I saw how German people welcomed refugees at a railway station, it made my heart skip—just watching that on television was tremendously uplifting; I cannot imagine what it must have been like to have been there. That was a lesson for us in Scotland and for the UK Government: we need to step up and follow Germany's lead in showing compassion and humanity.

The decision to resettle 20,000 refugees in the UK is welcome, but it is not enough, as members said. When I heard the number 20,000 I thought, "That sounds significant", but when I heard that

that was over five years my first impression dissipated in an instant. I hope that the UK Government will revise its plans and do more, because more needs to be done. The Germans have taken more people in a single weekend than the UK Government plans to take over five years. That puts the issue in context.

The UK Government has drawn a distinction between people who have remained in camps and those who are making the potentially deadly journey to Europe. Some 2,500 men, women and children have drowned in the Mediterranean this year. If making that perilous journey—putting one's family's lives in the hands of unscrupulous people traffickers—is not an indication of dire need and desperation, I do not know what is.

The existing plans offer those refugees little hope. If they reach Calais, they are simply greeted by barbed wire and new, higher fences. My colleague Tim Farron was deeply affected by his visit to Calais earlier in the summer. He was convinced that the vast majority of the people he met were not economic migrants but refugees and should be treated as such.

The risk is that we will offer refuge to people who are comparatively safe and well housed and fed in camps—although income in camps is going down—but neglect people who are suffering elsewhere. We have seen images of holiday makers enjoying their holidays on Greek islands alongside refugees who are struggling to get something to eat, which send a pretty chilling message. I hope that the Parliament will join me in urging the Home Secretary not to ignore the people who are already travelling to Europe in search of safety. We should not unjustly punish someone for making the most difficult of decisions.

We need to work with our European partners in responding to the biggest humanitarian crisis in a generation. Piecemeal, unilateral action is not the answer.

The Conservative amendment asks us to agree that

“tackling the root causes of this crisis must be a priority”.

The only sustainable solution in the medium to long term is to bring about the conditions that are required for people to want to remain in Syria and the surrounding region. The UK Government intends to raid the international development budget to fund domestic resettlement efforts. If we think that keeping people in the region is the best thing to do, why are we cutting the international aid budget to fund efforts over here? We should be boosting our spending. We have a great record on our target to spend 0.7 per cent of our gross domestic product on aid, but during this crisis we should be doing more, not less, in the international field.

The Prime Minister's response throughout the crisis has been confused. He cannot decide whether those travelling to Europe are economic migrants or refugees, he cannot decide whether to erect barriers or to embrace our humanitarian responsibilities, and he cannot decide whether to work unilaterally or with our European partners. I urge the Prime Minister to choose compassion, to choose to embrace our moral, social and political obligations, and to choose to be part of a co-ordinated international effort. We cannot wait until the war in Syria ends before we act for the people who need help here right now.

I urge those on the Conservative benches to echo the words that have been spoken in this chamber today, because we need their support to get through to the UK Government and to make it see the sense in having a co-ordinated, compassionate effort. That way, we can make a real effort.

15:25

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** The origins of the catastrophe that faces us today lie with Governments, but the most effective response to what has happened has been with individuals, and that has often been the case down the paths of history. In 1898, Émile Zola, a French literary giant, took on the power of his Government when injustice was done to someone in the army. His efforts were recognised by two consecutive nominations for the Nobel prize for literature and he eventually overcame, but posthumously. In 1968, we saw Jan Palach immolate himself in Wenceslas Square in Prague as part of the Prague spring, which eventually led to change in his country and indeed in the Soviet bloc, and in 1989, in Tiananmen Square, we saw a single individual stand in front of the tanks. Those people did not do that for personal glory or for any reward from anyone else. In fact, to this day we do not even know the name of the man who stood in front of the tanks in Tiananmen Square.

When we look at the Scottish response to the situation, we look at the response of the individuals in our community, which has been excellent. The same is true throughout the United Kingdom and in countries across Europe. People from our countries have historically been welcomed to other countries. It is now our turn to welcome those in their extremity to our shores and to our support. I welcome the launch of the website [www.scotlandwelcomesrefugees.scot](http://www.scotlandwelcomesrefugees.scot); I see an excellent contribution there from the Scottish Refugee Council on fundraising and how practical help might be given. I hope that many people will look at that.

It is worth looking at our own situation in Europe. We are the home of colonising nations,

benefiting enormously over hundreds of years from countries around the world. Now, in their extremity, it is our turn to help those who actually helped us to build the wealth that we depend on today.

Of course, the whole thing is not just about money, although money is the most important thing that many of us will be able to contribute. In fact, it is hardly about money at all. As Sandra White said, it is a moral issue. No man, woman or child stands alone in the world. In the palm of our hands is the future of desperate people around the world. Their very lives depend on us. Physical threats drive people from countries, as do violence, lack of shelter, lack of food and lack of water. None of those is new, but the scale of the problem today is, alas, very different from what happened previously.

In the late 1930s, we supported Jewish children in particular out of the hands of the Nazis. There were tens of thousands then, but the numbers are orders of magnitude greater now. Forty years ago, I visited a refugee camp in the West Bank and I remain moved by just thinking about that visit. I know that others in this Parliament have visited refugees in many places around the world.

It was only towards the very end of my father's life that I discovered that he had briefly worked with a Christian charity and had been based in an office in Brussels getting Jewish children out of Germany in the late 1930s. Indeed, he told me that he was arrested by the Gestapo in Cologne in 1938. Being my father, he talked his way out of the situation, but today's refugees cannot simply talk their way out of their extremity. They need us to speak for them.

The Conservative amendment talks about underlying causes. Those are not simple; they are diverse and there will be future challenges to our morality and our practicality. As the minister who took the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill through the Parliament, I return to that subject as something that will cause huge problems in the future. As the climate changes and we benefit, people around the world will find themselves migrating.

In recent times, we have seen many other examples of migration in Europe. One of my friends has just spent many months out in Bosnia, working with people who were affected by the war there. Let me remind the chamber that Syria and the adjacent areas are important to our history and where we are today. Sumeria, which is part of Lebanon that is adjacent to Syria, was the origin of money as the transition from a herdsman culture to an agrarian culture gave rise to the need for money. Our number system comes from there, as do many of the intellectual underpinnings of our society, while Damascus is the oldest continuously

occupied city in the world. The Poles came here in the 1940s and 1950s, but the Scots went to Poland in the 1830s.

We do not demand action because it is easy; we demand action because life is incomparably more difficult for refugees if they are denied help. More than ever, it is for us to provide that help in the refugees' extremity.

15:31

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Our response to the current global refugee crisis that we face, both in Parliament and throughout the country, should start from the principle that we should treat our fellow human beings as we would want to be treated in such a crisis. No one sets sail across a sea in an overcrowded rubber dinghy if they are not desperate, nor do they put their families' lives and their own in the hands of people traffickers if that is not their only hope. No one wants to die crowded in the back of an overheated lorry.

Just last week, we saw on the news that people in Syria are being subjected to chemical attacks. The use of chemical weapons is truly shocking—no wonder people are fleeing that and the many other atrocities. Everyone has been shocked by the horrific scenes and deaths as millions of people from Syria and other countries seek refuge, thousands of them in Europe, but the truth is that it should not take a refugee crisis in Europe and the public outrage at the death of Alan Kurdi for the Prime Minister to take action. The humanitarian crisis requires to be dealt with with the utmost urgency. People need to access help and refuge as soon as possible. The Prime Minister has given a commitment to take 20,000 refugees over a five-year period, but, as Claire Baker said, that is not enough, particularly given the fact that millions of people are affected and 20,000 is the same as the population of Renfrew spread throughout the whole UK. We need to take the long-term view that, if people need refuge and we are offering it, why should they have to wait five years for us to meet our commitment?

I believe that we need to see countries not just making commitments but delivering on those commitments now. I am sure that some people will disagree with that. To them I say that, although 20,000 refugees might sound like a lot, as the minister has said, Germany has taken many more. As David Miliband said last week, the United Kingdom gave refuge to 75,000 people during the Kosovo crisis. Britain's and Scotland's response to the Kosovan crisis, when our intervention was necessary, demonstrates that we have led the world previously during such humanitarian crises, and we should do so again. In 1999, my mum was

a social worker for Renfrewshire Council and met young children and their families from Kosovo off the plane at Glasgow airport. We should welcome refugees from Syria now in the same way that we welcomed those from Kosovo 16 years ago. I am sure that lessons can be learned from how we did that successfully then.

We need to show the way again. We all have a responsibility to offer refuge to those who need it, and all Governments in Europe need to accept their responsibility. However, sadly, that has not been the case. As has been said, the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has appealed for Europe to take 160,000 refugees this year. That proposal needs to be put into perspective—that number equals the population of Renfrewshire spread throughout the whole of Europe. We need to do more.

We know that Germany has offered refuge to many people, but many countries have not. The scenes of refugees in EU countries fighting to get on trains or walking in their thousands down motorways are deeply disturbing. I want Scotland and the UK to offer refuge, as we are doing, but there needs to be an effort by all EU countries. The Hungarian Prime Minister denying the crisis and saying that it is Germany's problem is not the sort of leadership that we need right now.

It is often in the worst of situations that we see the best in people. In recent days, people across the country have shown how willing we are to offer help to those who need it. It is critical now that we match our words with action. In my region, we have seen the work of many caring and selfless people, such as Jade O'Neil from Renfrew, who has set up a group called Renfrewshire refugee aid to collect and transport much-needed aid and supplies to people in camps in Calais. Yesterday, I joined a summit at St Mirin's cathedral in Paisley organised by Bishop John Keenan, at which churches, charities, local councils and many MSPs, including Hugh Henry, came together to form the Renfrewshire refugee support group.

At that meeting, there was a consensus that the council was best placed to co-ordinate the response at local level and praise for the arrangements that are already in place. I trust that any strategic and practical responsibility will be devolved from the task force to councils, working in partnership with other civic organisations, local charities and churches, to organise the response.

There was also a recognition that it will not be easy. I welcome the funding that the Scottish Government has committed to give to local authorities. Although that will contribute to the work of councils in helping and settling refugees, I know that they will need to add to it from their own resources. I welcome the fact that the minister has said that he will keep the issue under review.

Currently, the Scottish Government assistance works out at around £1,000 per refugee, and it will be £500 per refugee if we take our full share of the UK Government's target.

**Humza Yousaf:** I recognise what the member says, but it is important to note that the VPR scheme comes with money already allocated to local authorities. I do not often give credit to the Home Office but, in fairness to it, it has shown a flexibility and an openness in engaging with local authorities and the Scottish Government to find out how much more local authorities might need to integrate refugees. There is a willingness on the part of all partners to ensure that the financial package is suitable for those who are resettling refugees.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must begin to close, Mr Bibby.

**Neil Bibby:** I welcome what the minister said, because it is critical that we ensure that refugees have the right support, whether in education, social work, housing or translation services.

Our communities and our people have an energy, a purpose and a willingness to act. We now need our councils, the Scottish Government, the UK Government and other EU Governments to work together and act, because people in other countries will see if there is a difference between what we are saying and what we are doing.

15:38

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** The statue of liberty faces towards Europe, drawing in the immigrants from across the world who have made the USA what it is today. It says:

"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

However, in the current case, what we find is politicians and the media hiding behind a term—"migrants"—that is both incorrect and dishonest. The tens of thousands of people who are seeking refuge in Europe are not simple migrants, and it is that dishonesty—that hypocrisy—that drives me to speak in today's debate.

I see that dishonesty and hypocrisy in the UK Government. My friend Sandra White spoke about dictators. Maybe the Conservative Party will tell us in its summing-up speech how it helps any of the affected countries to have a huge arms fair in London today, to which many of the regimes involved have been invited along at taxpayers' expense. Hosted by the UK's arms sales export unit, it is the largest arms fair in the world. Maybe

the Conservatives will be able to explain that. If they cannot, that is just utter hypocrisy.

The people who are seeking sanctuary from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries are not making a choice about where they might live and work; they simply know that they cannot go on living where they are. In other words, those people are asylum seekers and refugees. They are not dumping all their worldly goods, their homes and their familiar culture, friends and surroundings because they want to leech off the UK benefits system: they are seeking sanctuary.

Europe has a responsibility to protect the vulnerable and respect the rights and human dignity of all people arriving at its borders. The rights guaranteed in the 1951 refugee convention are sacrosanct and all Governments must respect them. A few keen Tories were involved in setting up that convention, and perhaps some Tories should now look back at their history.

As colleagues have said, the UK response of taking 20,000 Syrian refugees from camps by 2020 is welcome but more must be done, especially on a Europe-wide basis. The Scottish Government's task force can help in the medium term, but right now we need action to manage those anguished and destitute people so that they can find proper care and protection. We cannot simply stand by and hope that other countries will step in and pick up the slack. In a climate of reactionary, right-wing and extremist propaganda regarding refugees and immigration more widely, the need to make a humane and compassionate stand is all the more vital.

At the weekend, we saw tens of thousands of people across the world attending vigils and seeking to help the refugees. Scottish families are coming forward with offers of spare rooms, support and food, showing a real empathy with the victims. Those families know that it is purely a matter of chance that they happen to be living somewhere that is rather more congenial than Aleppo or Homs, and they are aware that, "There but for the grace of God go I."

I emphasise that we must tackle the crisis on the shores of Calais or Lampedusa, or at the borders of Austria or Hungary. We cannot just say, "Well, they're already in Europe, so they're not our problem." We need to look ahead to developing solutions that can trammel the greedy smugglers and notorious gangs that take every remaining penny from people and load them on to dangerous dinghies in high seas.

While we struggle to tackle those aspects on a united European basis, the UK cannot simply stand by and say that it is not our problem: it is everyone's problem. Families trekking across Europe cannot be sorted out by our telling them

that they should just stay where they are. Where people are fleeing for their lives, those in a more comfortable position have a moral and a human rights duty of care and protection. Many of those people are fleeing from the kind of bombs and guns that we are selling in London today.

There is, too, a rights gap issue in relation to unaccompanied children who have refugee or humanitarian protection status. They have no right to family reunion, even with first-line relatives, whereas adults do—as they should—despite it being often inaccessible. The very least that the UK Government can and should do about that gap in terms of the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme, given that it is proactively identifying who to admit, is to amend its criteria and, hence, the immigration rules so as to provide unaccompanied children with the right to family reunion.

Children not being given that right is contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and—I suspect—the non-discrimination protections for age in the Equality Act 2010. The current rights gap is a clear injustice as well as nonsensical, as families should, in the best interests of the children, be together. The rights gap needs to be filled for the Syrian VPR and the immigration rules; ideally, it should be filled for all unaccompanied children with refugee status, or who are part of humanitarian admissions.

I am immensely proud of what Scotland has done for refugees and of the Glasgow campaign to welcome refugees, which I joined about 16 or 17 years ago. I am proud of the spirit of compassion that propels our people and our Government. However, 11 more children washed up on our European shores this week; we have to do something to prevent that from happening and we have to do it now.

15:44

**Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on what has become Europe's worst refugee crisis since the second world war, but saddened that I have to do so.

Save the Children has estimated that, so far in 2015, more than 350,000 desperate people have made the journey across the Mediterranean Sea. It is estimated that more than 2,700 people have died trying to reach Europe, with the majority of them drowning in the Mediterranean.

Since January, in Italy alone, 7,600 children have arrived unaccompanied, without any parents or family at all. For the children who survive the treacherous journey, the terrifying ordeal is not over. Many have seen and experienced untold horrors during their journey. The physical impact



of travelling is also clear, as many suffer severe sunburns and blisters from their journey, and many children have lost their toenails from the huge distances that they have walked. The truth of the matter is that those children will be helped very little by the measures that are being introduced.

Last Wednesday, we saw the almost unprecedented sight of seven different political parties in the House of Commons uniting behind a clear and simple message: the UK must do more to provide aid in the humanitarian crisis.

The people of Scotland were quick to recognise that we must do more to help, and, in response, I am certain that we in this Parliament are united in adopting a strong cross-party approach. Councils around Scotland are already working to resettle refugees, and we will support the collection of aid for delivery to refugees. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has said that it has received an “overwhelming, unprecedented response” from local authorities making initial inquiries about how to proceed.

As members have said, Glasgow City Council has already provided homes to 55 Syrians who have fled the war in their home country. It has also agreed to take in more, outlining its belief that that is simply the right thing to do. I was delighted to see the success of the Glasgow sees Syria event in George Square on Saturday, which included drop-off points for food donations from members of the public, and to hear the council’s new leader Frank McAveety call on the Government to accept more refugees.

As Claire Baker mentioned, the University of Glasgow has also announced a series of measures to support refugee students who have settled in the UK, including offering four fee waivers—one for each of the university colleges. The fee waivers will be available to applicants who do not currently qualify for free tuition.

As many members will be aware, a crowdfunding project has been set up by a Lanarkshire group to pay for a convoy of vans to carry vital supplies to migrants in Calais. A team from Wishaw plans to take sleeping bags, blankets, clothing, food and toiletries to a refugee camp near the port town in northern France in October.

We must keep the momentum going and ensure that the crisis is confronted full on with all the compassion, help and support that we can provide.

The response from Scotland and the UK is not unique. From Austria to Spain, citizens are standing in solidarity with refugees and have even been on the front line to receive them and offer them humanitarian aid directly. What is clear is that the scale of the crisis means that no single

country can deal with it alone. We truly need a global response.

A number of international development experts have spoken out about how wealthy economies outside Europe such as Japan and Hong Kong can also share some of the responsibility. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has argued that Europe cannot respond to the crisis

“with a piecemeal or incremental approach.”

It has recommended that there should instead be a mass relocation programme of at least 200,000 places in which all European states take part and which has an effective reception and registration mechanism that can receive, register and identify people who need help. As the UNHCR stated,

“We are facing exceptional circumstances; we need an exceptional response.”

We need a comprehensive global programme that can help those who have already made the deadly voyage to Europe and those who are displaced in their own country. We also need to go much further than what has been proposed to date. Britain has a long history of welcoming people who are fleeing war and persecution. This time should be no different.

15:50

**Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):**

Like all members who have contributed to the debate—bar one—I say that it is very important that we do not limit the number of refugees to 20,000. That number should be a starting point, and there certainly should not be an end after four or five years.

I ask members to take particular notice of the language that surrounds the subject. Christina McKelvie talked about that. I read the reason that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees gave for why word choice and not confusing the two words “migrants” and “refugees” matter. I thank John Lamont for not using the “m” word. That is very important. It is commendable that we do not use that word in the debate. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said:

“Yes, there is a difference, and it does matter. The two terms have distinct and different meanings, and confusing them leads to problems for both populations.”

That confusion has a significant impact on the refugees at our borders who ask for sanctuary.

As the minister said, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, was very clear on the matter on 9 September. In his state of the Union speech, he said:

"A true European refugee and asylum policy requires solidarity to be permanently anchored in our policy approach and our rules."

The solidarity that he speaks of will be supported and enhanced by accuracy and clarity in our language.

From the beginning of the refugee crisis, I have highlighted the importance of the language that is used. I encouraged the correct and appropriate use of language when discussing the appalling situation in Calais, which I have been working on for months on behalf of the Scottish fishing industry to defend its interests and to bring safety for both heavy goods vehicle drivers and refugees.

The tone of how the media reported the situation in Calais followed the UK Prime Minister's shameful tone. Stewart Stevenson talked about the French writer Émile Zola, who was also a journalist. One of his most famous articles was entitled "J'accuse". I accuse the UK Prime Minister and the Tory Government of not using the right language from the outset of the refugee crisis. The refugee crisis started at our borders—it started in Calais—and the response to it was not only the tone that has been used, because we have also erected a fence. We see the same kind of fence in Hungary today. I go back to the time when the fence in Calais was celebrated by not only politicians, but the media. We are now blaming Hungary for what is being done, but we should point the finger at ourselves—at our own UK Government, which took that decision in Calais.

We have talked about compassion. In July this year, nine people died trying to reach the UK. What is the UK Government doing about that? There is a refugee camp in Calais. I heard some people saying, "We should send the Army. We should send the Gurkhas." I agree. We should send the Gurkhas. Why not send the French foreign legion as well—to help those refugees, tend them, assess them and ensure that they find sanctuary in the UK or France?

It is very important that the proper tone is used when we talk about migrants and refugees. Our First Minister's tone could not have been more different from that of the Prime Minister, and she could not have been more clear, when she said:

"It is important we don't describe this as a migration crisis".

It is a refugee crisis.

The media responds to the tone of politicians. Christina McKelvie spoke about dishonesty. That dishonesty has to be laid first at the feet of politicians: they are the first to set the tone, and the media follows. It is very important that we keep the right tone.

The BBC's "Newsnight" published a poll a week ago under the title "Migrant Crisis". When questioned by Positive Action about the confusion of those terms during an interview, BBC Scotland's Sarah Smith said that she did not believe that the term "migrants" was used at all in the commissioning of the poll. That was incorrect; it was not accurate. The poll asked the participants for their views on the thousands of migrants who have recently crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Europe.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):** Will you draw to a close, please?

**Christian Allard:** Word choice matters. It is very important that we keep that in mind in this debate. Interchanging the terms "migrant" and "refugee" is not helping. For anyone still asking the question, "Refugee or migrant—which is right?", here is the answer from the people who know. The UN refugee agency, which assesses refugees across the world, says:

"Refugees are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution ... it is too dangerous for them to return home, and they need sanctuary elsewhere."

They are not migrants. I am a migrant—I am no refugee. Let us remember where we all come from, because in Scotland's story, we are all worth the same.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. We are very tight for time. Patrick Harvie has up to six minutes.

15:56

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I offer my support for the Scottish Government's motion and the Labour amendment, and my recognition of the tone of the Scottish Government's response to the entire issue. It is a tone that we should all be willing to support. It contrasts strongly with the many, many years of racist and xenophobic rhetoric that we have seen in much of the media in this country and in other European countries in relation to immigration and asylum.

Let us remember that, even at the time of the UK election, when the crisis of people drowning while trying to cross the Mediterranean had already been going on for years, those people were being described in the national press in this country as "cockroaches". That is shameful, but it is the rhetoric that we have seen from newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*. Just weeks before the photographs of that little body on the beach changed the country's emotional response, the *Daily Mail* condemned the BBC for broadcasting an episode of "Songs of Praise" from the refugee camp—sorry; the "squalid migrant ghetto", as the *Daily Mail* described it—at Calais. That kind of racist and xenophobic rhetoric has been driven

deep into the cultural response from this country—and from many other countries—to the issue.

Much of that rhetoric rests on the assumption, or argument, that to have refugees come to a country and to have to accommodate those refugees is to bear a burden, and it is a burden that we should bear grudgingly. Any one of us who cannot close our eyes and imagine swapping places today with somebody who is making that hazardous journey or with somebody who found themselves this morning on the wrong side of a razor wire fence does not recognise what it means to bear a burden. It is the people who have to ask for help and refuge and who have to flee, whether from war, persecution or economic poverty, who bear a burden. The people who are in a position to be able to offer that help are the privileged ones—we are not the ones who bear a burden.

I see our Prime Minister going into a country such as Lebanon, which, as we have heard, already hosts well over a million refugees—something like a quarter of its population—and then I hear from the same political quarter the language that suggests that we must accept only a “sustainable” level of refugees. I find it hard to express my deep discomfort with and objection to that kind of language and the idea that a country of the wealth and scale of the United Kingdom can see a level of no more than 20,000 over five years as “sustainable”. When our Prime Minister has direct experience in the past few days of the situation in Lebanon, I find that indefensible.

Of course there has to be support in the region and support for the other countries that are dealing with the situation on such a scale. I understand the intention of those who talk about creating safe havens in the region, but exactly how safe will they be and what are the logistical, resource and, potentially, even military implications of creating safety in that situation? Those issues are insurmountable. Even if that was achieved, none of it would discharge our obligation to meet the immediate need that faces us.

I want to talk about the difference between refugees and economic migrants. Yes, the two are legally distinct, but they are all human beings and whichever legal category a person is described as being in, their innate dignity deserves the same level of respect.

The humanitarian crisis and the issue of refugees and others coming to Europe are not new, although at the moment they are on a bigger scale than Europe has known for a considerable time. One thing is new, however: the UN refugee agency describes it as “mixed flows”, by which it means large numbers of people on the move at the same time with a range of experiences and reasons for travelling and from a range of places. I expect that that will continue and that such

challenges will increase across the world as time moves on.

Therefore, a new settlement will be necessary. We certainly need one that involves EU-wide co-ordination and the provision of safe routes of passage, but it must also recognise the mix of causes of displacement, which include war, persecution, exploitation, poverty and environmental destruction. It must also recognise the contribution that wealthy, powerful and—dare I say it—oil-producing countries have made and will continue to make to all those causes, as well as the contribution of the arms trade, which Christina McKelvie mentioned. This country still fuels that trade through companies such as Selex, which was mentioned in a different context in the chamber last week and which has a track record of dealing with the Assad regime. We must take responsibility for all of that.

16:02

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Migration is of course reserved but, thankfully, compassion is not. I congratulate the Scottish Government and members from across the chamber on their unequivocal support for the refugees—the sad, dispossessed people trudging across Europe after terrifying and desperate journeys across seas in fragile inflatables. That experience strips away individuality and makes the electrician indistinguishable from the professor; it is a kind of bleak egalitarianism. It is sad but true that individualism was reinstated only through the image of a small child washed up on a tourist beach as human flotsam, which at last called Europe and the UK Government to account for their inaction, about which stark questions have been raised.

However, will that deep swell of emotion and shame last, and is it being translated into action, which is what counts? Sadly, with exceptions such as Iceland, Germany and Scotland, as others have mentioned, Europe is literally retreating behind its national boundaries. We see fences that are reminiscent of second world war camps and forbidding steel barricades draped with ragged barbed wire that even the most desperate wire cutters cannot tackle.

Although I support the amendments, like others, I cannot let the Conservative Government at Westminster completely off the hook. It took far too long to take action and it has now promised too little, although it is something. We must have more than the vulnerable persons relocation scheme, which has taken only 216 Syrians since early last year. I remind members that the scheme applies in the main to sick children, women who have been raped and men who have been

tortured—what a set of hellish tests to have to pass to be permitted into the compassionate UK. At the same time, the Cameron Government is actually considering bombing in Syria, which would lead to more bombs and more people displaced and dispossessed—people who we now know have already endured attacks by chemical weapons.

I am sure that the majority of Scots support the Parliament but I call to account those who do not. Patrick Harvie referred to some of the newspapers that stirred up venom towards the refugees. I recently wrote in the Edinburgh *Evening News* about the distinction between the shock and distaste of the public at the shooting of a protected lion—Cecil—and the attitude to refugees, who are to be shown compassion when they are in the water but to be labelled migrants and to be a problem once they are on dry land. As other speakers, including Christian Allard, have said, language is everything.

Here are two unwelcome comments that I have received. I will spare the blushes of the people who sent them to me, but they are genuine quotations. The first is:

“I couldn’t care less about the rabble Migrants. Most decent honest people (there are some of us left, obviously not MPs MSPs) don’t want them in Europe. Send them back or let them perish at sea, its their own fault anyway. People quite rightly care more about Cecil.”

That represents a lone voice, but there are voices like it in Scotland and we must not ignore the fact that they exist. Here is another:

“I am writing to you to express my disappointment and anger at today’s announcement by the First Minister to volunteer Scotland for a minimum of 1000 asylum seekers. I find it extraordinary that the Scottish Government is finding itself so busy taking the short-term moral high ground and ignoring both the short and long term implications of opening the doors to what no doubt will be thousands of immigrants who know nothing of Scotland, its traditions and history, are unlikely to integrate and will NEVER return to their homeland.”

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** Does Christine Grahame accept that, horrific as those comments are, they are a tiny number against the huge outpouring of support?

**Christine Grahame:** Yes, but my point is that we must tackle those people as well. We must challenge those views, which have been brought into question since one child drowned and was washed up, as many other children have been. That is what it took for some of the tabloids to be shame faced, but the venom that they stirred up is reflected in the views of some people who write to us. Of course they are in the minority, but it is important to put that voice in the Parliament: although the vast majority of people in Scotland are kind and humane, not everybody is.

I hope that those individuals are listening—I was so disgusted at their comments that they are lucky that I am not naming them—and that anybody else who takes those views is listening. They should be ashamed even to think that way.

Ordinary people throughout Scotland are taking action. Across all our constituencies, including mine in the Borders and Midlothian, they are collecting clothes, shoes—they are important because people have worn out their own shoes—and toys for children. Those are the actions of the vast majority of the Scottish people. They are the actions that speak louder than words. They, not the few voices that object, are the majority voices of Scotland, but I wanted the other voice to be heard and challenged in the Parliament

16:08

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The scale of the crisis is now clear. The desperation of the people moving to and through Europe is daily on our screens. The futile and punitive response of many Governments is a blot on our collective conscience. The abject failure of the European Union even to agree and develop a rational strategy is an indictment of our political institutions.

According to a recent Al Jazeera English article,

“So far this year, nearly 340,000 people ... have crossed Europe’s borders. A large number, for sure, but still only 0.045 percent of Europe’s total population of 740 million.”

The problems that Syria’s neighbours face are much greater. As other speakers have said, the numbers are huge. Even Saudi Arabia, which has been criticised, has accepted 2.5 million Syrian refugees and, interestingly—to respond to Patricia Ferguson’s point—has now entered 100,000 into its public school system.

Our response now reminds me of our previous patchy response to Jewish immigration. We have heard in recent days about the Kindertransport and how wonderful it was when we took in some 10,000 children. However, we fail to recognise the pogrom that condemned six million Jews, Gypsy Travellers, homosexuals and others to death.

I have a relative by marriage who, along with his brother, fled to Canada while much of his extended family died in the camps. I remember in primary school hearing testimony about the ship with 900 Jews that was turned back because they did not have the right paperwork. We are hearing that again today. Back then, our Government responded only to public pressure; it did not take a principled stand. Is it really much different now? Money is valuable and helpful, but it is not enough.

In the short time that I have left, I will focus on health issues. The World Health Organization

recently released its regional refugee and resilience plan—the 3RP—which is a framework that aims to address the fundamental needs of Syrian refugees who are residing in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The plan places an emphasis not only on refugees but on the host communities and the effects on them, and on the sustainability of response activities.

To date, the UN agencies and non-governmental organisations have received only 23 per cent of the \$4.5 billion that is required for operations. Given the protracted nature of the crisis, which is now in its fifth year, we have seen funding diminish—often being diverted to other disasters—despite the unflagging need. The health sector continues to struggle with a funding gap of 83 per cent, which has severely hampered the amount of health assistance that is available for refugee and host communities.

The health challenges in Syria are huge. Vaccination coverage has decreased drastically, from 99 per cent in 2010 to 62 per cent in 2014, and water supplies have dropped to half of pre-war levels. At the same time, unhealthy and overcrowded living conditions for displaced persons have led to an increase in hitherto uncommon communicable diseases such as hepatitis A, typhoid and brucellosis. Polio and measles have become a major concern, and leishmaniasis, which was previously confined to northern Israel, has now spread to Lebanon and Jordan.

Last week it was reported for the first time that there have been 11 laboratory-confirmed cases of middle east respiratory syndrome coronavirus infection in Jordan since 26 August, and that five of the 11 patients have already died.

A Médecins Sans Frontières doctor has said:

“There are too many patients, too many stories. But one patient shows the madness of this crisis—a child—who I will never forget until I die: he had injuries all over his face, his arms, his legs, and yet he was laughing! Just laughing and laughing. Children usually are afraid of our injections and needles, but he was not. He just laughed, laughed at everything.”

Those who are involved are the bravest of our health professionals. Five Médecins Sans Frontières staff were abducted in early 2014—although they were subsequently released—and yet MSF continues to operate 100 clinics, health posts and field hospitals.

The WHO, in its latest report on Syria, states that there have been 242 attacks against healthcare facilities, 615 attacks against healthcare workers and 172 deaths. Those attacks have increased.

Kezia Dugdale today asked the Scottish Government to work with the five medical schools,

the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties in Scotland, the British Medical Association and the General Medical Council to bring over and support Syrian medical students whom the UNHCR has identified whose studies have been interrupted.

The Labour amendment congratulates the University of Glasgow on its initiative—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask the member to draw to a close, please.

**Dr Simpson:** There are two other groups on which we should focus: nurses whose training has been interrupted, and junior doctors who need training in physical and psychological trauma, communicable diseases—as I have mentioned—and rehabilitation and restorative surgery. I hope that the Government will allow me to be involved in helping to co-ordinate a response—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must close, please.

**Dr Simpson:** —involving psychologists, the BMA, the GMC and nursing unions.

Finally, I have raised the issue of waste medicines—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must stop now, Dr Simpson. I call Roderick Campbell.

16:14

**Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. It cannot have escaped anyone's attention that, in Europe, we are experiencing the worst refugee crisis since the second world war.

With that in mind, I had high hopes for last week's Opposition day debate in the Commons, led by the SNP's Angus Robertson, during which he called on the Prime Minister to “think the unimaginable” and urged him to accept many more Syrian refugees, including those who are already present in Europe. Unfortunately, the SNP parliamentary motion, which called on the UK Government to publish a report detailing what more it could do to alleviate the plight of Syrian refugees, was defeated by 311 votes to 259, despite having cross-party support.

Welcome though the UK contribution to refugee camps in countries adjoining Syria is, it cannot be the end of the matter. Welcome though the UK's record in reaching 0.7 per cent of GDP in its international aid target is, it cannot be a case of either/or—either aid or refugees. A small country such as Denmark manages to achieve its obligation to both. Nor does the UK's action mean that we should in any way seek to encourage people smuggling.

The Scottish Government has been clear that it will do its part. I welcome its announcement of a humanitarian task force and the willingness of the Scottish ministers to help and offer sanctuary to those in crisis. Such a response has been led by the First Minister, who has joined public figures, such as the Finnish Prime Minister and Bob Geldof, who have each stated that they would warmly accept refugees into their homes.

In communities throughout Scotland, there have been overwhelming messages of support for Syrian and other refugees. I believe that the strength of positive feeling towards such refugees defines Scotland as a country: friendly, welcoming and accepting of those who are from different backgrounds.

Let us be clear who we are speaking of when we employ the term “refugee”. Refugees are human beings, first and foremost. These are usually desperate people who have been forced to leave their homes to escape persecution and civil war. They are not, as some have suggested, economic migrants or migrants.

The figures for refugee populations by their country or territory of origin, provided by the World Bank, indicate that the number of Syrian refugees is rising at an alarming rate. The UNHCR has stated that, in 2014, at least 1.66 million people submitted applications for asylum—the highest level ever recorded. That figure is set to rise, but it is important to note that, as daunting as those figures may appear, we must not shirk from our responsibility to help our fellow human beings.

Indeed, in his first annual state of the union address in the European Parliament, Jean-Claude Juncker acknowledged that the numbers were “frightening” for some, but declared that

“now is not the time to take fright. It is time for bold ... concerted action”.

He went on to say that this is

“a matter of humanity and ... dignity. And for Europe it is also a matter of historical fairness.”

It is simply not, as some people argue, an issue just for the Schengen countries.

Less than two weeks ago, I asked the First Minister whether she agreed

“that fortress Britannia is the very opposite of what is required”—[*Official Report*, 3 September 2015; c 20.]

to manage the refugee crisis. I argued that

“what is needed is a pan-European approach”.—[*Official Report*, 3 September 2015; c 20.]

I continue to think that such an approach is needed, which is why I am so concerned by the actions taken yesterday by Hungary to close its borders. This morning, we woke to the news that the first refugees had been arrested for attempting

to cross into Hungary from Serbia overnight. Hungary’s actions are part of a worrying trend by some, but not all, countries in Europe to pass the buck instead of seeking to work collectively, shoulder to shoulder, with their European neighbours.

Here, although the UK Government has taken a first step by announcing that it will accept up to 20,000 refugees over the next five years, I believe that it can do much more at a time when we have seen Germany committing to take on as many as 800,000 refugees. In one weekend, 13,000 arrived in Munich. If Germany can do it, a state as wealthy as the UK can, and should, do more. Although I accept that the UK has granted asylum to 5,000 Syrians since 2011, the figure of up to 20,000 over the next five years seems somewhat insignificant.

Then we have Theresa May, who has announced that the UK Government would opt out of the EU’s quota plan to relocate 160,000 refugees. Fortress Britannia indeed. However, despite reluctance on the part of the UK Government, praise must go to the efforts of many charities across Scotland and the UK. Save the Children has launched the emergency child refugee crisis appeal to fund support programmes to help families, including young children, who have been forced to flee their homes in Syria and other countries across the middle east and Africa. In its first 24 hours, the appeal raised more than £500,000. The money raised will go towards supporting the various relief programmes, extending as far as Syria itself. That response confirms not only the dedication of charitable organisations but that of the public who are contributing.

The petition calling for the UK Government to take more refugees has raised over 400,000 signatures already. Vigils such as those held in Edinburgh and Glasgow over the past weekend truly underline the solidarity of the people in Scotland and indeed elsewhere.

In my view the overwhelmingly positive attitude shown by the people of Scotland must be matched by a commitment by the UK Government to do more. The UK Government needs to lead by example to build on the UK’s rich history of accepting refugees.

Only by coming together across Europe can we alleviate the plight of the refugees and find long-term solutions to this crisis.

16:20

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** There clearly is a human response to this tragedy. Others, from all sides of the chamber, have spoken very movingly about that this afternoon. As human beings we have a responsibility for our

neighbours, be they in the next street or the next continent. However, I think there are a range of other reasons why we should welcome refugees as well. I will focus on some of those this afternoon, perhaps partly in answer to the correspondence from Christine Grahame's constituent.

For one, Scotland is a land with a lot of empty space. We cleared people out of the Highlands over a long period of time and the abandoned ruins of their homes are still to be seen. We have never really recovered from that and the empty space is still there. One of the problems for Scotland in recent decades has been the failure to grow the population. I know that Jack McConnell recognised that, and successive Governments have done so as well. It is very hard to grow our economy if the population is not growing.

Therefore, if we are seeing an opportunity to get numbers of people, especially of young people who are keen to work, it could be a great opportunity for Scotland. My understanding is that it is often the better educated who are able to come here to Europe as refugees. That gives us the opportunity of gaining a young, educated and enthusiastic workforce.

I have been looking at some of the figures and have found some very interesting facts. Countries with higher net immigration—to echo the point made by, I think, Patrick Harvie, I do not think that either migration or immigration are always negative words—have seen a relieving of pressure on the Government. That is debt due to the fact that most migrants are of working age and pay tax, and so the country's debt falls. That is according to a report called, "The Fiscal Impact of Immigration in the UK".

In fact, for the UK, non-EU migrants have made a net fiscal contribution reckoned to be £5 billion for 2000 to 2011. That is according to research by the centre for research and analysis of migration at University College London. The research also noted that immigrants who have arrived since 2000 are 43 per cent less likely to claim benefits than UK citizens.

Over the period 1995 to 2011, immigrants who lived in the UK provided the UK labour market with human capital that would have cost £49 billion if it had been produced through the UK education system. On top of that, immigrants have contributed £82 billion to fixed public goods—goods that have a constant amount of funding such as defence no matter the size of the population.

Speaking on Bloomberg last Wednesday, Professor Christian Dustmann, the director of CREAM at UCL and co-author of the aforementioned report, said:

"It is very likely that we are seeing well trained, young and skilled migrants who, if they enter the labour markets will very likely make a contribution."

He points out the barriers that are present and notes that they are challenging, but he estimates that the cost of programmes for dealing with that is

"insignificant in the scale of national budgets."

He also points out that the potential gains are "substantial" and, most important, he sees this crisis as

"an economic opportunity not an economic burden."

Therefore, my basic argument is that not only do we have a duty to help with a clear humanitarian need; it is also good for Scotland to see a wide range of new folk coming here. Apart from anything else, Scots have left our shores over the centuries and moved to many other countries, hopefully bringing benefit to Canada, Australia, Malawi and elsewhere. It seems only fair that now it is our turn to receive people here. Our people have been welcomed overseas when they needed a home; now it is our turn to welcome people to Scotland.

I am not just arguing that Scotland benefits economically; we benefit culturally and in many other ways. Our schools do better because we have youngsters from an African or Asian background whose enthusiasm for education can rub off on young Scots.

I hope that I have argued today that all of us in Scotland can benefit from the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. It is about love for our neighbours, but it is not only about that. I am encouraged by the tone of today's debate. I exhort all parties in Scotland to continue that positive tone, and I urge the UK Government to be a little less fearful and a little more welcoming.

16:25

#### **Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab):**

Someone would have to have a heart of stone not to have been moved by the events that we have seen in Europe in recent months: from the dead boy, Alan Kurdi, being washed up on the shores of Turkey, to the columns of desperate people marching along motorways and railway tracks in Europe and the desperate scenes in the refugee camp at Calais. It ill behoves us to turn our eyes away from the crisis, irrespective of where it is. It is sad that it has taken those recent events to provoke the reaction that we now see.

There is a challenge to each and every one of us. Neil Bibby mentioned the meeting in Paisley yesterday that was organised by Bishop John Keenan, at which were representatives from local churches in the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church and the Scottish Episcopal

Church. The four main political parties were represented, as were charitable organisations such as the Society of St Vincent De Paul. We all spoke with one voice at that meeting. We put all our differences aside to say that we wanted to do something locally in Renfrewshire and we thought that both the Scottish Government and the UK Government should do what they could—and do more—to help.

It was heartening to see people wanting to do something to make a difference, but we should not underestimate the complexity of the problem. We need more than simple, knee-jerk reactions. As Neil Bibby said, what people such as Jade O'Neil are doing is commendable. My colleague Mary Fee has helped to organise the taking of clothing and other goods to Calais. Such work needs to be done, but we only help a small number of people when we do it. It is commendable that we are offering to take in up to 20,000 refugees over five years, but that is but a fleabite of the problem that exists in Europe and beyond. The human reaction is to help that which we see put in front of us, but we need to do much more.

Members have discussed the root causes of the problems and the political decisions made by the west, for which those poor, unfortunate people are paying a high price.

We need to help those in the refugee camps—we need to take more. However, the people who are arriving on our borders in Europe make up only a 10th of the total number of people who have been displaced by conflicts in the middle east. Something needs to be done for those who are on the borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and so on. We cannot ignore their plight. We cannot respond only to the people who are arriving in Europe.

We should also reflect on the fact that Lebanon, which bears such a heavy burden of refugees from the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, has for many years had to cope with the burden of the conflict in Palestine and many people who have been in camps for generations. The problem of refugees is not new for Lebanon, although we are only now responding to it. Something must be done to help people in those areas.

We should not forget particular groups who are hard hit by the conflicts that are going on. We should remember what happened to the Yazidis and the many people who are still incarcerated by ISIS in its camps. We should not forget the beleaguered Christian communities, some of the oldest in the world, which are being persecuted not only for political reasons but for religious reasons.

This is a multifaceted problem. It does not require a simple solution that involves us salving

our consciences for a couple of days by sending things to people who are in the press at the moment. There is a need for a long-term solution, and I am delighted that we in Renfrewshire are saying that we are all in this together and will do what we can.

16:30

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** In response to yesterday's meeting of the European justice and home affairs council, Amnesty International said:

"It is disappointing that again the UK Government has refused to take part in the immediate relocation of 160,000 refugees from Italy, Greece and Hungary, as agreed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council ... We are further concerned by the Home Secretary's proposals for 'removal centres' or 'safe camps' in Africa where refugees who cannot be returned to countries such as Eritrea would be sent. Given the huge underfunding of refugees camps currently, leading to insecurity, insanitary conditions and lack of adequate food, water and shelter, it is clear that establishing new, long-term refugee camps will suffer from exactly the same problems and further risks of human rights abuses."

Some of the points about the medical aspects of refugee camps have been made by Hugh Henry and by Richard Simpson.

Amnesty International is extremely critical of the UK Government and the Home Secretary. The UK Government has obviously not risen to the challenge, but the people of Scotland and elsewhere definitely have, through the things that they have been doing to alleviate the difficulties that many thousands of refugees face.

I pay tribute to the Aberdeen refugee solidarity campaign, which has gathered an unbelievable amount of donations. It had the use of the Aberdeen Academy of Performing Arts for a couple of days last weekend and it ended up with two full rooms of goods in no time at all. My Facebook and Twitter feeds were full of messages about what people were doing. People felt that they needed to do something to help others. It is a pity that European Governments, including the UK Government, are not reacting in the same manner as individuals in Aberdeen and others across Scotland and the world. Those overwhelming responses are truly amazing to see.

During the debate, we have heard that we already have a number of Syrian refugee families in Scotland. It is horrific for them to watch what is happening on Europe's southern borders and in the refugee camps that surround Syria.

I have received correspondence from a Syrian who is living in Scotland. I will not go into great detail about it, but this person's brother was kidnapped by ISIS and he has three vulnerable female relatives in Turkey. He is desperate to get



visas for those relatives to join him here. He says that he would be responsible for their accommodation and living costs. There would be no burden on the state and no need for anyone else to take folks in. The man wants to help his relatives, as we all would in the circumstances that we are witnessing across Europe and in the countries that neighbour Syria.

I appeal to the Home Secretary to look at cases in which people can support their relatives to come here and to be flexible about granting visas in such cases. That would be one way to show compassion and to do so quickly.

16:35

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am pleased to close today's interesting and timely debate for the Conservatives. The debate is about what all members accept is one of the greatest challenges for the international community for many decades. I thank the organisations that provided excellent briefings, including Oxfam, Save the Children and Amnesty International.

I agree with members who, rightly, praised the many individuals, charities and local authorities in Scotland that are working with Syrian refugees to alleviate suffering or which stand ready to do so when refugees arrive in this country. That includes local authorities in my region, the Highlands and Islands, which are making practical plans to assist refugees.

We are a compassionate and tolerant nation and I have no doubt that we will make refugees welcome in our communities, as we have done in the past. I readily acknowledge that many people in Scotland and the rest of the UK have been deeply moved by the media coverage of the truly desperate plight of Syrian people who are fleeing the terror of Assad and ISIL and the tragic deaths that have occurred as people tried to reach northern Europe.

Some members have criticised the UK Government's approach to the Syria crisis, so I want to put on record some facts about the situation and the support that the UK is providing, as our amendment seeks to do. The UK has already provided sanctuary to more than 5,000 Syrian refugees, and the Prime Minister announced last week that the UK will accept 20,000 additional refugees over the parliamentary session. Those refugees will come from the camps in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

The approach will provide refugees with a safer and more direct route to the United Kingdom, so that they need not risk what the minister, Humza Yousaf, described as a desperate and dangerous journey to Europe by what Amnesty calls the

deadly central route, which has cost many lives. We will use the established United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees process for identifying and resettling refugees. In addition, the UK Government plans to expand the criteria for the UK's vulnerable persons relocation scheme for Syrian nationals. That is welcome.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie McGrigor:** Not just now.

The approach will lead to an increase in the number of the most vulnerable refugees who are granted refuge here, which is what many people want. Also welcome is the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday of his decision to appoint a new minister with the remit of looking after the interests of Syrian refugees who come to the UK.

I emphasise how much the UK is contributing to the international aid effort in relation to the Syrian crisis. That contribution includes support to many of the nearly 4 million refugees who are living in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon and to the 8 million displaced Syrians who are still living in Syria. Millions more Syrians who have yet to leave their homes are also suffering from the violence and need assistance. That must never be forgotten.

We are the world's second largest bilateral donor of aid in relation to the Syrian conflict. As John Lamont said, we have provided more than 18 million food rations and given 1.6 million people access to clean water. We are providing education to a quarter of a million children, and that number will increase.

The UK Government announced an additional £100 million in aid last week, which will take our total contribution to more than £1 billion. That is the UK's largest-ever response to a humanitarian crisis. We should be proud of that and proud that the UK is one of the only countries in the world to honour its commitment to spending 0.7 per cent of GDP on foreign aid.

All of us can agree that the Syrian refugee crisis is horrendous, heartbreaking and upsetting, but the reaction to it must be emotion combined with rationality, which I will come back to. The crisis is a direct consequence of the political situation and the violent civil war in Syria, so we should surely concur with the UK Government and the international community that we must adopt a comprehensive approach that tackles the problem's causes as well as the consequences.

The greatest contribution that the UK can make is to work to end the conflict. We must all continue to seek a peaceful settlement that enables a political transition and an end to violence. Is that not really what we want? However hard that might

be and however far away from that position we might be, we must take a similar approach to Libya and other states where political violence and turmoil are harming the people of those countries and driving the refugee crisis.

Hugh Henry is right, and I am sure that no one in this Parliament has a heart of stone. The images in the media—especially those of the drowning of innocent children—are truly heartrending. I cannot even imagine the grief that those parents go through. However, as I said before, the reaction to the crisis must be emotion combined with rationality.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the member accept an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is closing.

**Jamie McGrigor:** That means proper organisation on a massive scale. That is what serious politicians are expected to do, and we have never been more needed than we are now.

16:41

**Alex Rowley (Cowdenbeath) (Lab):** I welcome the debate that we have had and the consensus that there has been in the chamber. The minister mentioned negative attitudes, and we acknowledge that there are different views. Although it is a minority of people who could be described as Christine Grahame described them, such attitudes are why we need to have the debate. We need to encourage discussion across the country so that, if there is any fear about the number of refugees who are coming in, we can have an open dialogue and remove that fear.

The image of a three-year-old boy lying dead on a beach in Turkey shocked the world. If anything good comes from the death of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, his five-year-old brother and his mother, I hope and pray that it is that the world will act to help those who are fleeing persecution, conflict, generalised violence and human rights violations. The world is facing a global crisis on an unprecedented scale, with 60 million people displaced around the world. Around the country of Syria, there are 4 million refugees, of whom 2 million are children. We need to get across the point that half the world's refugee population are children.

Anne McTaggart was right to say that we need a global response. Sadly, Willie Rennie was also right when he said that the UK Government and David Cameron seem confused about the issue. As well as stepping up to the mark and ensuring that the whole UK plays its role in welcoming refugees and ensuring that they have the right support and that the right resources and

infrastructure are put in place to support them, we must, as the United Kingdom, lead the rest of the world in facing up to a global crisis that requires a global response.

I welcome the consensus and the views that have been expressed in our debate, but I have to wonder what Scotland's Parliament and Government will do to ensure that the UK Government and the British Prime Minister step up to the mark. We need to look at everything that we can do to ensure that.

The Scottish Refugee Council has set out clear recommendations for what it believes the UK Government needs to do. It says that the UK Government should afford full refugee status to Syrians who are resettled in the UK through the Syrian vulnerable persons scheme and any other resettlement programmes; grant full family reunion rights, including to children who are resettled in the UK through the scheme; and increase the number of refugee resettlement places in line with our European neighbours as part of the EU-wide resettlement programme. It asks the UK Government to review refugee family reunion policies to allow family members to join relatives who are already in the UK and to open safe routes to the UK from overseas by providing humanitarian visas to enable people to get to safety—countries such as Austria, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain have already done that.

The Scottish Refugee Council points out that the UK Government has made it more difficult for Syrians to come here legally by having dramatically reduced the proportion of visa applications that it has approved for Syrian nationals since the conflict began. In 2010, the UK approved 70 per cent of visas for Syrian nationals; in 2014, the figure dropped to 40 per cent. That is why Syrian families, including women and children, are having to put their lives in the hands of people smugglers and are risking their lives in crossing the Mediterranean. This summer alone, 2,500 men, women and children have died as a result of trying to cross the Mediterranean. We need to look at opening up the legal routes that can allow refugees to come into Europe over land. We in the Scottish Parliament need to push for that, but we also need to press the UK Government on that.

The Scottish Refugee Council says that the UK Government should suspend returns under the Dublin regulations so that no one is returned from the UK to another EU country for the purpose of deciding their asylum claim, and that the UK Government should treat refugees who arrive in the UK fairly and humanely by ensuring that they can access the asylum process, receive a fair hearing for their claims and have adequate

support to live a dignified life and that they are not detained. It says that the Scottish Government should press the UK Government to participate in collective EU responses to the crisis, including by playing its role in taking responsibility for refugees in Europe. If the Parliament agrees to the motion, we need to ask ourselves what we will do to press the UK Government. We need to show that Scotland has a stronger voice.

The issue of negative attitudes has been raised. I have written a few pieces over the past few weeks, and as well as people welcoming what I have written and saying that it is right, people have told me that they have concerns and fears. Two weeks ago, I heard the director of Shelter Scotland talk on BBC radio about the housing crisis that we have in Scotland. People who are involved in that crisis fear that the situation will get worse. That is why, although we should welcome refugees and do everything in our power to raise the number from 1,000 to 2,000 refugees—as John Mason said, we have a vast area of land in our country and it is not as though Scotland is full—we must ensure that the investment comes in and that we can provide the infrastructure to satisfy basic needs, such as the need for housing. As politicians, we are already arguing for a national housing programme to tackle the housing crisis for the people who currently live in Scotland, so we need that level of investment—that cannot be stressed enough.

I associate myself with John Mason's comments. This is not just about the humanitarian crisis, although it is right that we step up to that. We also need to point out the benefits that Scotland can get from welcoming refugees into our country, which he outlined.

I welcome the debate. Let us encourage similar debate across Scotland, but let us make sure that, when we welcome increased numbers of people to this country, they are properly supported and properly resourced and have a roof over their heads. We must make the necessary investment. That is the duty of this Parliament, the Scottish Government and the UK Government.

16:50

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil):** This has been one of the best debates that the Parliament has had, and it shows the Parliament in a very good light. I say at the beginning that the Government will support the Labour amendment, and we will also vote for the Tory amendment, although we share some of the concerns that have been expressed around the chamber in relation to some of the wider aspects of the UK Government's policy.

There are two areas of special priority. We believe that 20,000 should be seen as a minimum and not a maximum number when it comes to meeting our commitment to these people. It would not be the first time that a Conservative Prime Minister had lived up to our moral and international responsibilities. In very different circumstances, in 1972, when the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin ejected every Asian from Uganda, within hours the then Prime Minister Ted Heath agreed that the UK would take 28,000 of those refugees, and we took them within a matter of weeks, not within five years. Therefore, there is a good lesson to be learned from what Ted Heath did.

**Patrick Harvie:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Alex Neil:** I will give way in a minute.

The second point, which has been made very ably by Alex Rowley and others, is that although we welcome the fact that we are doing what we can to help the people in the camps, there is the wider issue of the people in Italy, Greece and Hungary. We should be doing what we can to help the poor people who try to get across the Mediterranean into those countries, because it is among members of that population that the drownings are taking place. We need to play our part in helping them. As well as working with the UK Government and pressing it to live up to its moral and international responsibilities, we must make sure that the EU lives up to its responsibilities because, as has been said, the EU has been found wanting in many aspects of this area of policy.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way, and I am pleased that he shares some of the objections that I and others have voiced about the Conservative amendment. However, I think that there is a desire for consensus. In the interests of avoiding a division, would the cabinet secretary welcome, as I would—even at this late stage—an intervention in which the Conservatives at least acknowledged why some of us are uncomfortable with the term

“a sustainable level of refugees”

and that the wording could have been better chosen?

**Alex Neil:** I would certainly accept an intervention from the Conservatives to explain that, if they wish to make one. Perhaps John Lamont would like to take the opportunity to do so.

**John Lamont:** I thank the cabinet secretary for allowing me to speak. The purpose of the amendment was to find consensus so that we could all agree. The use of the word “sustainable” simply reflects the point that Alex Rowley made. There are concerns out there about housing and

other issues; we simply want to bring people together while acknowledging the concerns that exist. Our amendment was not designed to be divisive in any way; we were simply trying to get across the point that the taking in of refugees needs to be done in a managed way, and not just here in Scotland and Britain but across the entire union of European countries.

**Alex Neil:** It would be extremely helpful if Parliament were able to unite in the vote at 5 o'clock, but that is obviously a decision for each group to take.

On the issue of negativity, I agree with Alex Rowley that it is very much a minority of people who take that point of view, but I do not think that it can be ignored. Our responsibility is to take on the negativity, to explain to people why it is our duty to do what we are doing for the refugees from Syria, and to reassure them that it does not represent a major threat to people who are on housing lists, or to any other aspect of what people are looking for from the Scottish Government or local authorities.

When we get into deeper discussions with the UK Government on the issue of resourcing the infrastructure and other support for the refugees, I hope that we will be in a position to point out that some additional resource has been made available so that we can do what we need to do and, perhaps, to do even more than the action that we have already announced.

The task force has taken on those jobs and, as a member of the task force, I can say that some of the other issues that have been raised in the debate will be and are being addressed by the task force and its two subgroups. For example, I can say to Sandra White, who raised a very important point about collection points and the ability to organise ourselves and get information through the website, that we are taking urgent action on that matter to try to ensure that people can mobilise support, whether from local authorities, public agencies, individuals, local groups, charities or whatever. It is very important that we do everything that we possibly can do to mobilise the maximum support from the Scottish nation.

Although we are talking about an unprecedented number of refugees, it is very important to put that in context. As Hugh Henry—I think—mentioned earlier, in the great scheme of things even the significant numbers that we are talking about are a very small proportion of the total population of Europe: less than half of 1 per cent of the entire European population. To argue that we could not accommodate a good proportion of those people would not be a valid argument at Scotland, UK or Europe level. That is why, as the First Minister has made clear, we will live up to our responsibilities, and if we are required to take

more people than the initial 1,000, we will gladly take more than our fair share of refugees coming to the UK because we firmly believe that it is the right thing to do.

We are also very much of the view—we discussed this in the task force this morning—that the crisis is now, and that the 20,000 figure should be increased and, as far as possible, be front loaded so that we do as much as we can to deal with the immediate crisis that people are facing, and that we do it as quickly as possible.

**Claire Baker:** Can the cabinet secretary outline how the task force will present its views to the UK Government and ensure that it is well aware of the Scottish Parliament's views on the issue?

**Alex Neil:** With regard to the UK Government, both the Department for Work and Pensions and the Home Office are members of the task force. In addition, we have senior personnel who phone in to all the task-force meetings, and Humza Yousaf will be in London next week to talk to Home Office ministers. He has already spoken this week to the new minister about what needs to be done. We are therefore in constant touch with the UK Government and I am sure that the First Minister will make the point about our views to the Prime Minister, as will Fiona Hyslop in her role in various discussions with the UK Government. So, at every level—at political level and official level—we are in touch almost daily with the UK Government and are urging it to do much more than it has agreed to do at the present time.

I have to say that we were getting a more positive attitude from officials this morning, particularly in relation to resourcing issues. We are obviously going to continue to work on that, because we are clearly all united in recognising the need for the UK Government and all of us to do as much as possible to tackle the crisis.

I wanted to cover many other points, but I do not have time to do so. However, I will emphasise a number of issues in terms of what we are dealing with. In addition to the task force, we have set up two subgroups, one of which is dealing specifically with housing and which is co-chaired by Margaret Burgess, the Minister for Housing and Welfare, and Councillor Harry McGuigan from COSLA. That subgroup will look urgently at the accommodation requirements of the refugees once we get more information on their profile and know, for example, how many children, including unaccompanied children, and families will be coming to Scotland.

The other sub-group is on integration. I was with Glasgow City Council councillor Frank McAveety yesterday, who volunteered to organise refugees who are already in Glasgow to advise us, the task force and the local authorities of what they think we need to do to make it as easy as possible for

the refugees who are coming to this country to integrate quickly and to get the translation and other support services that they need.

We will report to Parliament on a regular basis on the work of the task force, and we will notify members as we make progress. However, I think that it would be a great event if a united Parliament tonight were to send a loud and clear message to the UK Government, to the European Union, to the international community and, in particular, to the refugee community throughout the world, saying that Scotland will do everything possible to assist those people in their desperate plight. Thank you.

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is that amendment S4M-14245.2, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion number S4M-14245, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on responding to the global refugee crisis, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is that amendment S4M-14245.1, in the name of John Lamont, which seeks to amend motion number S4M-14245, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on responding to the global refugee crisis, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)  
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)  
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)  
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)  
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)  
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)  
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)  
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)  
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)  
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

#### Against

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 103, Against 3, Abstentions 0.

#### *Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion 14245, in the name of Humza Yousaf, as amended, on responding to the global refugee crisis, be agreed to.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the severity of the global refugee crisis and calls for a coordinated international humanitarian response; acknowledges the contribution of the UK Government to the humanitarian needs of those in the refugee camps bordering Syria and the commitment to take 20,000 Syrian refugees from these camps by 2020; calls on the UK Government to increase the numbers it will accept, coordinate with its European partners and take its fair share of the refugees arriving in the EU; welcomes the appointment of a UK Government minister to coordinate the delivery of this commitment; notes that the UK's response has been further boosted by an extra £100 million in aid, taking the total contribution to the Syrian refugee crisis to over £1 billion, which is the UK's largest response to a humanitarian crisis; notes that, while taking in a sustainable level of refugees is important, tackling the root causes of this crisis must be a priority for world leaders; welcomes the cross-party summit on the refugee crisis and the establishment of the taskforce to coordinate Scotland's response, which has been aided by £1 million from the Scottish Government; further welcomes the overwhelming public response to the crisis, the generosity of spirit being demonstrated across Scotland and the positive response of local government, the third sector and communities; commits to ensuring that those arriving in Scotland will be given a warm and positive welcome and that Scotland will take a fair share of refugees; notes the positive measures that the University of Glasgow has taken to support refugee students by offering fee waivers, extending its Talent Scholarship programme and accommodating two Syrian academics as PhD students, and encourages other universities to explore opportunities, with support from the Scottish Government, to offer places to students whose studies have been interrupted and whose education could benefit their home country in the future.

## Community Energy Fortnight 2015

### **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):**

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-14109, in the name of Mike MacKenzie, on community energy fortnight 2015. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes Community Energy Fortnight 2015, which takes place from 5 to 20 September, with events across Scotland to celebrate and highlight what it considers the important role that communities have in promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency; notes that events to mark the fortnight include site visits and knowledge-sharing events in the Highlands and Islands, South Lanarkshire and in other local authority areas; recognises what it sees as the vital role that communities will play in helping to meet Scotland's carbon and renewables targets, and congratulates the Scottish Community Energy Coalition and other groups that support communities and rural businesses to develop renewable energy schemes to create sustainable communities across Scotland.

17:04

### **Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands)**

**(SNP):** I am delighted to have secured this debate as an opportunity to highlight the significant contribution that has been made by communities across the Highlands and Islands and, indeed, the rest of Scotland in ushering in for Scotland a new energy future that is brighter, cleaner and greener, in which we have greater energy resilience and security, and which is less dependent on a few big companies as the sole providers of energy.

I share the Scottish Government's vision of a future in which communities are empowered in every sense of the word—not just politically, but economically—and are able to invest in and develop their own community assets and opportunities. Community energy projects are an obvious opportunity to capture the benefits of renewable energy and to produce funding streams that will, in turn, empower other projects in a virtuous spiral. That has enabled many communities to tackle local problems more effectively than they could be tackled by other agencies.

That is why I am so glad that the Scottish Government has set the ambitious target of 500MW by 2020 for community and locally owned renewables. I am glad that, thanks to the efforts of small businesses and communities throughout the country, we are well over halfway to meeting that target. I was also glad when the Scottish Government set up and invested in the community and renewable energy scheme—CARES—loan

fund to de-risk the early pre-planning stages of community renewables projects.

My passion for community-owned renewables began when the “dancing ladies” of Gigha—Scotland's first community-owned wind turbines—were erected in 2003. I was a board member of my own community's development trust then and was lucky enough to be invited, with representatives from community organisations throughout Scotland, to attend a conference, over a weekend on Gigha, to learn from the experience there. The generosity of the Gigha folk in sharing their hard-won knowledge and their generous hospitality on a wonderful weekend are etched in my memory.

One further thing that is not quite so positive remains etched in my memory. The local planning officer who dealt with the application gave a presentation. He started his talk to the 200 or so good folk in the audience by saying in tones of bureaucratic bombast that there were only two words in the planner's lexicon: “no” and “maybe”. I was as shocked as the majority of the listeners were. I agree with him that there should be two words that guide our planners, but they should undoubtedly be “yes” and “maybe”.

I have touched on that because often the hurdles in our planning system are the first hurdles that are experienced by communities that are considering renewable energy projects. That is why I am pleased that the First Minister announced a root-and-branch review of our planning system two weeks ago, when Parliament resumed.

Our planning system should be the midwife of sustainable development, and community renewable energy projects are often the embodiment of the principles of sustainable development. As such, community renewables projects need the assistance—not the resistance—of local planners.

We have come a long way since the dancing ladies of Gigha were first erected. I was particularly pleased to see the successful deployment of the world's first community-owned tidal generator off the Shetland island of Yell last summer. The developer of the device—Nova Innovation—is due much credit, not least because at least 25 per cent of the total development expenditure was spent on Shetland. Shetland Composites, which is a small local business, manufactured the carbon-fibre turbine blades, for example.

There are many more good examples of community-owned renewables projects, many of which are aimed at tackling fuel poverty or paying for badly needed renovation of local homes. That is what the community on Gigha is doing.

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands)**

**(Con):** Mike MacKenzie makes a point about the dancing ladies of Gigha and the money that they bring in. Why does he think that the Gigha community is in such a bad way financially despite that?

**Mike MacKenzie:** I do not necessarily accept the proposition that the Gigha community is in a bad way financially. Communities often have to borrow money, but when we look at their balance sheets properly, we realise that although there is a bit of borrowing, overall, they are in a good situation. I think that the people in Gigha are due great credit for being prepared to shoulder some risk in borrowing money to advance their projects, so I do not necessarily accept that view.

There are many more possibilities for further community-owned renewable energy projects, but I would be remiss if I did not say that future projects are threatened by the United Kingdom Government's energy policy—by a UK Government that is forsaking renewable energy in favour of nuclear power, by a UK Government that has failed to invest in the grid infrastructure upgrades that are necessary to allow renewable energy projects to develop, and by a UK Government that is significantly reducing feed-in tariffs as well as bringing the renewables obligation certificate scheme to an early close. It is important to realise that it is not just onshore wind projects that are threatened by that energy policy; all renewable energy technologies are threatened.

It is time that full powers over energy were devolved to this Parliament so that the Scottish Government can continue to support Scotland's communities in harvesting the benefits of local community energy.

17:11

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I congratulate Mike MacKenzie on securing the debate. It is both timely and important, and I very much welcome his motion. In celebrating community energy fortnight 2015, we should celebrate the fact that there are 144 projects that we know about that bring in about £10 million of benefit to communities every single year. That is absolutely something to celebrate.

I want to highlight that renewable energy and energy efficiency should go together. Particularly for rural communities, where people are living in hard-to-heat homes, one of the big benefits of community energy schemes has been the capacity of communities to reinvest in the housing stock in their areas, not just to create new energy that people can draw on but to reduce the amount of energy that they need to consume. It is that win-win situation that we need to highlight.

There is a fuel poverty crisis, so the issue is partly about the supply of energy being owned at the community level and the opportunity of community co-operatives but it is also about the retrofitting of people's existing homes.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** No, I want to crack on—I only have two and a half minutes.

I congratulate Mike. I particularly welcome the community energy coalition because it is an important coalition. It has the knowledge of environmental campaigning and the experience that comes from Friends of the Earth—I say that as a member; the expertise that comes from the Energy Saving Trust; the knowledge about our buildings that comes from the National Trust for Scotland; and the experience of the National Union of Students, many of whose members are living in incredibly expensive rented accommodation with really bad energy efficiency standards. That is a powerful combination to lobby for change.

I very much agree with the comments that were made about the retrograde step of the renewables obligation and the feed-in tariff being dramatically reduced at the UK level. That step is already jeopardising investment in renewables projects. We should be campaigning against it and pushing the UK Government to change. I do not think that anyone would dispute the fact that we can reduce subsidies for mature technologies as the costs come down and instead target the newer, innovative renewables that we want to see. However, the cavalier approach that is being taken puts jobs at risk, so I hope that we can work together to get that changed.

As a former planner, I agree with Mike that more can be done on planning, but one of the biggest things that we could have done in the Parliament in the past 10 years would have been to remove the requirement for applications for small-scale developments. I have been campaigning on permitted development rights for more than a decade now. I put the measure in a proposed member's bill and I campaigned for it to be included in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

It sounds like a small thing, but the red tape and cost that are involved in applying for planning permission for solar photovoltaic projects and other small projects on houses mean that many people do not go through the process. We could fix that instantly. Therefore, I ask the energy minister whether he will act on that now. Many people have missed out on the opportunity to take up the feed-in tariff but, if the minister could make



that change, that would give some support to emergent community projects.

I would like the Scottish Government to support more community projects. We would like many more to move ahead. I have visited projects in Edinburgh, Fife, Gigha, Aberdeen, South Lanarkshire and Glasgow. The most recent one, the Harlaw energy project in the Balerno area of Edinburgh, will make a real difference to energy production and will provide a benefit to the shareholders. Surely, we should be encouraging that across the country.

There are benefits for individuals and communities. We need to reinvest in green jobs, as we need more of them in Scotland. Let us hope that community energy fortnight will raise awareness and political support for action in Scotland and at UK level.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before we move on, I remind members to use full names, please. It is important for the *Official Report* and for the public who are watching proceedings.

I have a wee bit of time in hand if members care to take interventions, although that is of course the member's choice.

17:16

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, and welcome back.

I congratulate Mike MacKenzie on securing the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to support his motion. Mr MacKenzie made a good speech. As he might expect, I did not agree with all of it, and I will come to the point of disagreement later, but he made the case well.

I am pleased to support the principle of community energy. The first community energy fortnight was held in 2013 and, in a short space of time, it has become an established fixture in the calendar. I am sure that all members can point to community projects in their areas that have been a success. I will mention just two in my region.

The first is the Levenmouth community energy project at Methil in Fife, which was awarded £4.3 million from the local energy Scotland challenge fund in July. It is located at the hydrogen office in Methil and will generate renewable energy for use in creating hydrogen gas to run a fleet of up to 25 hydrogen vehicles. The scheme will use hydrogen as an energy store for grid balancing on the local energy park. Given the growing interest in energy storage, it is encouraging to see that innovative project being supported.

The second project is a hydroelectric scheme at Callander in Stirlingshire. It is a 425kW scheme on the Stank Burn that was built with more than £2

million of grants and loans and which hopes to generate around 1.3 million kilowatt hours of energy per year for the next 20 years. Those are both good examples of the sort of projects that are being supported.

I suppose that it was inevitable that there would be some criticism during the debate of the UK Government's recent moves, which were announced earlier in the year, to reduce subsidies for wind power. We will have the opportunity to debate the issue in more detail on Thursday, so I simply point out to members and remind them that the reforms have been widely welcomed by many communities across Scotland.

The economist Tony Mackay has calculated that the level of subsidy for onshore wind power was between two and a half and three times higher than necessary. The result is that consumers have been paying higher bills for too long to support wind projects that should have been sustainable with a much lower level of subsidy. I therefore welcome the initiative that the UK Government has taken, which will deliver lower bills to consumers, and I again highlight the need for a more balanced energy policy.

I want to raise two issues in connection with the CARES fund, which Mike MacKenzie referred to. I support the principle of assisting community projects that enjoy local support. However, it is important that what are badged as community projects are in fact that and not just a means of developers trying to increase their chances of getting consent for schemes.

Two specific examples in different parts of the country—one close to where I live—have been drawn to my attention. In both, commercial projects have been promoted by developers, attracted very strong opposition and then, in effect, been rebadged as community projects with the help of sympathetic individuals who live in the area. However, of course, the same opposition still exists. To attract financial support from the CARES fund—which is taxpayers' money—a community project should be able to demonstrate that it has strong community support.

The second point is related. I am aware of payments having been made from the CARES fund for community developments to which there was substantial community opposition. In such cases, the community development is promoted by a small minority of individuals in the community and faces substantial opposition.

**Mike MacKenzie:** Does Murdo Fraser accept that some projects are of a scale or complexity that means that it would not be feasible for communities to take them forward on their own but it is perfectly valid for them to do so in partnership with commercial developers?

**Murdo Fraser:** I do not disagree with that, but Mr MacKenzie rather misses the point that I am making, which is that, if a project is a community one, it must be able to demonstrate community support.

It has been galling for the majority of a local community, who are opposed to a development, to see their money as taxpayers being used to fund a planning application that they then have to oppose without any commensurate public support for their opposition. There is a simple way to cure that problem: to require community projects to demonstrate substantial local support—perhaps through the support of a community council or in a local referendum—before they are able to access public funds. I hope that the Scottish Government is prepared to consider that further.

With those caveats, I am happy to support the development of community energy and the good work that is going on.

17:22

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I join others in congratulating Mike MacKenzie on securing the debate, which enables us to put on record our collective support for community energy fortnight and our thanks to those who are involved in the community energy coalition. As there will be an opportunity on Thursday to pick up more general issues on renewable energy, I will focus my brief remarks on some specific aspects of community energy.

To pick up a theme that Murdo Fraser was worrying away at towards the end of his speech, I reiterate the point that there is a distinction between community energy and local energy. Both undoubtedly have an important part to play, but there is a danger that, in the Scottish ministers setting an overall target for both, the two become conflated. They are different and provide different benefits. I understand some of the concerns that Murdo Fraser raised, even if I do not entirely share them.

Community ownership and co-ordinated action on energy are a powerful means of embedding renewable energy, energy efficiency and local value into our communities. They also provide practical, grass-roots initiatives that help to transform communities by enabling people to take responsibility. The Shapinsay Development Trust's wind to agri-energy project, which is quoted in the local energy Scotland briefing, is an excellent example on one island in my constituency and has a good track record in that regard. That is reflected not only on Shapinsay but in a wide range of different projects in Orkney, which provides a good—but by no means perfect—illustration of a mixed economy on renewables.

In a moment, I will come to more examples, including potential opportunities for matching local supply and demand more effectively and productively than happens at present. First, I will reflect on the problems that are created for community energy in Orkney by the continued limits of grid capacity.

As one constituent with intimate knowledge of such issues observed to me recently, the requirement for community projects to be actively managed on a non-firm grid connection calls into question their commercial viability. The active management system was an innovative solution to sweat the local grid asset, but it now appears to be curtailing development despite strong community demand and support.

Being more innovative in identifying local sources of demand would help. For example, the heating system for the replacement Balfour hospital in Kirkwall must make maximum use of installed renewables, which are already in place. I suggest to the minister that anything less would be not just a missed opportunity but a costly dereliction of duty on that key landmark project.

A recent Orkney renewable energy forum audit, which was funded by community energy Scotland and undertaken by Aquatera, showed that marine diesel accounts for the biggest fuel use in Orkney. Again, the inevitable replacement of the interisland ferry fleet offers an opportunity to test, learn about and demonstrate the use of renewables through the use of hydrogen as a renewable sourced fuel.

The project is similar to the one that Murdo Fraser highlighted. The local council and community energy Scotland are on the case with the surf 'n' turf project—with Government funding—which uses hydrogen to run the ships that are tied up at the quay. It is training mariners in using hydrogen and preparing them for the impending hydrogen economy. Such developments are good, innovative projects that will ease grid constraints for other community projects while utilising local resources and developing a local skills base.

Community action also offers scope for more effectively tackling fuel poverty, including extreme fuel poverty, for which Orkney sits at the top of the nationwide table. THAW—tackling household affordable warmth—Orkney and its predecessor bodies have done excellent work in looking at linking local generation with local affordable warmth, including affordable tariffs. Although the area is highly regulated, I am in no doubt that there are opportunities, with the right support, to make a real difference in addressing the scourge of fuel poverty in my community and in our society.

We have seen recently that, without the restraint of Liberal Democrats in coalition, the UK Tory

Government is quite happy to cut support for renewables. One effect of that is that approximately £100 million of community-based renewables projects will not now go ahead. I therefore urge the minister to press his UK counterpart for genuine financial differentiation for so-called community FITs, or feed-in tariffs. I am sure that that would help to deliver more of the projects that are at the heart of community energy fortnight and the wide range of benefits that I have seen at first hand in Orkney.

17:27

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I am pleased to take part in this debate during community energy fortnight and I thank Mike MacKenzie for giving us the opportunity to debate the topic this evening. I welcome the motion's focus on energy efficiency, rather than just on promotion of renewable energy, because we cannot benefit fully from investment in energy if we do not have windtight, watertight and well-insulated homes.

As we have heard, community energy fortnight celebrates community-owned renewable energy projects and aims to promote communities owning and generating energy together. I believe that we cannot overstate the importance of the topic, and that it can and should form a more central plank of our energy policy.

In its briefing, Friends of the Earth Scotland states:

"In the context of climate change and the historical carbon debt of industrialised countries, a renewable energy transition is imperative."

It is clear that that essential transition has many potential benefits. Renewables lend themselves to community ownership in a way that fossil fuels, nuclear power and unconventional gas do not. Community-owned renewables can help us to address the power imbalance that promotes inequality in the current system, which is centralised and inflexible and has resulted in the monopoly of the big six companies.

Scotland is energy rich, but access to that abundance is not as equitable as it should be. Even the World Bank has recognised that business as usual "will not remotely suffice" if we are to meet the goals of clean and universal energy. We will, on hearing such a statement, think of the billion-plus people in developing countries who live without access to electricity, but we should also consider those who suffer from extreme fuel poverty in Scotland. Earlier this year, at Energy Action Scotland's conference, we learned that 71 per cent of homes in the Western Isles are regarded as being in fuel poverty.

There are many benefits to enabling willing communities in Scotland to play an important role in meeting carbon, renewables and climate change targets, and they are worth fighting for. I believe that there is a universal will in Parliament to demand change and investment in that important area.

I am a shareholder in Harlaw Hydro Ltd, which has much in common with other projects that we have heard about this evening. The learning that those small projects are gaining will be shared, and the pathways to such projects will therefore be smoother in the future. The projects can share information about stumbling blocks and can develop a shared understanding of the Department of Energy and Climate Change's websites. They can discuss next steps and—most important—they can discuss their successes. Two projects that have tried to get off the ground are in Portobello and Leith, and hydro-power feasibility for the water of Leith is currently being considered.

We are on track to deliver almost twice as much renewable energy from community renewables as the Scottish Government's target of 500MW by 2020. Let us increase that target to 1GW and aim for 2GW by 2030, because there are so many benefits if we commit to and invest in delivering clean low-carbon energy, in terms of local employment opportunities, community development funds and fuel poverty alleviation, for example.

In Denmark, there is right-to-invest legislation that requires developers to offer 20 per cent ownership of wind projects to local communities. An incredible figure—70 to 80 per cent—of wind turbines in Denmark are under some form of community ownership. Denmark has the first island that is entirely renewably powered, by 11 onshore and 10 offshore turbines. That bottom-up approach has enabled that community to invest in the things that are important to it, whether it is a 3G football pitch, a youth club or—as Sarah Boyack mentioned—better housing.

Denmark is a fantastic example. In Denmark and Germany, citizens and communities have been the driving force not only for the development of renewable energy as a revolution, but for its acceptance. That is very important. I remind Murdo Fraser that fossil fuels continue to receive billions of pounds of public subsidy. Many of the constituents who write to me would like to see that transferred into the clean green low-carbon technology of the future.

17:31

**Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, thank Mike MacKenzie for bringing the debate to the chamber this evening. Mike is a great

champion of renewables combined with communities, particularly rural communities. Some of us have learned a lot from Mike.

As the motion says, local community projects play a “vital role” in meeting our carbon and renewables targets. They also make a major contribution to the overall economic performance of rural areas and the country generally. It is not just about wind. The term “community energy” is used in a variety of contexts, including electricity generation, grid relationship and collective purchasing power. Not so long ago, community benefits were seen as being somewhat narrow and divisive, and not necessarily directed to longer-term returns on investment in communities.

There have to be some common characteristics in any community energy scheme. The first is that ordinary people are involved in managing and running the projects through co-operatives or development trusts, and are able to access the required finance to allow them to set up their projects. Secondly, there must be a democratic and non-corporate structure. Thirdly, there should be tangible local outcomes for people living or working close to the projects, and fourthly, the profits should go back to the community or be reinvested in other community energy schemes. There is a bit of an analogy between wind turbines and the revolving door for community investment.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill supports local energy companies in achieving their goals. The main policy goal of the bill is to empower community bodies through the ownership of land and buildings, and to strengthen their voices in decisions that matter to them—no less so than on energy provision.

As has been mentioned, the planning process is also important. Perhaps all schemes should be mandated to ensure that they hold a pre-application process with local communities to allow extensive and inclusive discussions to take place around community ownership, co-ownership, rewards and benefits.

As we know, the Government has set an ambitious target of the equivalent of 100 per cent demand for electricity being met from our renewable sources by 2020. There is also a target for 2020 of 500MW being produced through locally owned schemes. The Scottish Government has assisted community projects through the community and renewable energy scheme, the renewable energy infrastructure fund and the £20 million local energy fund.

There are some great examples of local schemes throughout Scotland, but there are opportunities for many more. Community Energy Scotland is, of course, a registered charity that aims to build confidence, resilience and wealth at

community level through sustainable energy development. In its submission to the Smith commission it highlighted significant obstacles to realising that potential.

There is considerable scope for innovation through smarter grid management, local supply-chain arrangements and smarter approaches to demand management. The biggest obstacle, however, is that all main incentives for renewable energy development and renewables are reserved to and controlled by Westminster.

It has been suggested that the new centralised contracts for difference make it much harder for community projects to access them because of the cost and complexity.

It is essential that the power to determine and set renewable energy incentive policies, levels and licences be fully devolved, thereby enabling the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to apply an effective development regime to meet Scottish requirements, in tandem with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which would certainly help to achieve the objective. Local authorities should be encouraged to demonstrate leadership by supporting community groups.

Community energy projects play a vital role in employment, building physical and social capital, combating fuel poverty and, of course, helping Scotland to reach its renewable energy targets. We should do all that we can to support existing schemes and to encourage new schemes across Scotland.

17:36

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, thank Mike MacKenzie for bringing this significant debate to the chamber today, and for the comprehensive briefing that he and his office provided. I recognise the contribution of the Scottish community energy coalition in community energy fortnight 2015.

The development of community energy is a climate-justice issue, as Alison Johnstone said, not only globally in the lead-up to the Paris summit but here in Scotland itself, as I have stressed on a number of occasions.

From rural to urban areas, there are many different models for community energy to enable power and warm homes for our people.

The Friends of the Earth briefing, “Community Power—building on success” draws attention to the

“recent European Energy Package which talks about putting citizens at the heart of the energy transition.”

As a member of the Scottish Parliament's Co-operative group of MSPs I want to start by highlighting the value of co-operative models in this context. Energy4All, one of the coalition members, has been a key player in this regard. In my region, the Spirit of Lanarkshire Wind Energy Co-operative is now fully up and running. I was at its launch with the former MP Tom Greatrex, who was also supportive of it. Having raised £2.7 million in 2013, both its developments—Nutberry near Coalburn and West Browncastle near Strathaven—are now fully on stream. Despite relatively poor wind speeds in some cases and some technical issues, the 906 members of the co-operative have just enjoyed a return of 7.63 per cent for the period up to March 2015. The board of the co-op is now looking for ways to use some of the profits to support local communities in the coming years.

In an urban context, the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative launch will take place at the end of this month. In commending the co-operative model, I wish that group well, too.

Some of the co-operative models are for part of a larger multinational wind farm development and others are working in their communities in their own right.

I want to take a step back and look at the potential of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill in relation to community energy. In the past, I have visited Dumfries house, which along with Douglas & Angus Estates, and a number of estates throughout Scotland, has installed biomass boilers, from which tenants get benefit. In its submission to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, the Druidaig estate points out that "I am about to sell"—I am so sorry. If only it said that. It says:

"I am about to let three areas of ground to a company who plan to install mini hydro schemes to generate electricity. This will not just benefit us at Druidaig Lodge but the residents of Letterfearn as well.

My view of the proposed Land Reform Bill is that it will be of no advantage to Scotland to remove certain land from Landlords for it to be managed by the local community."

NHS Health Scotland sets out a different view in its 2012-17 corporate strategy, "A Fairer Healthier Scotland", which says:

"Our vision is a Scotland in which all of our people and communities have a fairer share of the opportunities, resources and confidence to live longer, healthier lives."

In its submission to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee, it said that

"several case studies, where Scottish land has transferred to community ownership, have highlighted a number of potential benefits. For example, community ownership of land in rural areas has enabled investment in local resources"

such as

"social housing and renewable energy schemes, which in turn have helped to increase population and school numbers."

I add that such things also bring local jobs.

Part 5 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill sets out the right to buy land to further sustainable development. I am clear that that should include looking favourably on community purchase of land for community energy use. The Scottish community energy coalition believes that community energy can and should, among other things,

"Encourage people to act cooperatively to create sustainable communities and give everyone an equal opportunity to own and control shared assets democratically."

I hope that the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill will take that vision into account.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I invite Fergus Ewing to respond to the debate.

17:41

**The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** Thanks are due to Mike MacKenzie for giving us the opportunity to debate community energy during community energy fortnight, which is—rightly—supported across the chamber. There was a prolonged discussion about the dancing ladies of Gigha, about whom I had not heard before. I wondered at first whether they were a Caledonian equivalent of the Folies Bergère, but I rapidly learned that they were not so.

We went on swiftly to extol community energy's benefits. I know that Mike MacKenzie is a doughty campaigner who has devoted a huge amount of time to helping communities to benefit from the resources that are on their doorsteps. I thank him very much for the work that he continues to do in that important area.

I will respond to some questions now in case I omit to do so later. To answer Sarah Boyack, I say that we are keen on extending permitted development rights. We are consulting on air-source heat pumps. If she wants to write to me about solar PV and small projects, I undertake to consider that. In principle, she is absolutely right: we do not want our planners' work to be taken up with unnecessary applications. We want to remove that problem and let planners get on with the more controversial issues.

Murdo Fraser said that communities that do not support projects are in a difficult situation, but he did not give any examples of the projects to which he alluded. That might have been because of

sensitivities. If he wants to give me examples, we can look at them.

The Scottish Government's good practice principles for shared ownership of onshore renewable energy developments—as it happens, I will launch them later this evening—will set out clearly what is good practice. I assure Murdo Fraser that all CARES community applicants must be properly constituted not-for-profit community groups.

Some schemes are delivering substantial returns in communities in which not every member originally supported the scheme. I do not know of many community members who want to send back the money or the benefit. Murdo Fraser raised a point, but he gave no examples.

**Murdo Fraser:** I did not want to embarrass any individuals by naming them in the chamber, but I am happy to write to the minister with specific examples if he wants to investigate the matter further.

**Fergus Ewing:** I would be happy to receive such correspondence. However, I hope that the launch of the shared-ownership principles will help to avoid any such issues by promoting good practice.

Mr Fraser referred to a Callander community scheme that is delivering up to £2.85 million over 20 years and which might help to fund new businesses, transport links for health services, help for young people and so on. I could mention many other such projects, such as those at Point and Sandwick in Lewis, and in Mull. Liam McArthur mentioned many in his constituency, which is in many ways the renewables capital of Scotland. Alison Johnstone referred to the Harlaw Hydro scheme, which I had the pleasure of opening three weeks ago. I did not know that she is a shareholder, but I wish her luck. I understand from the development trust that a good commercial return is being promised. Sarah Boyack, Claudia Beamish and Chic Brodie all mentioned schemes around the country. There are 140 schemes, in which nearly £9 million a year is being invested.

More than the money, the empowerment of communities working together for a common purpose gives many people and communities a sense of creating a legacy for children. At the Harlaw Hydro opening ceremony, the local primary school's children sang a song that they had written for the occasion. There was something moving about the thought that a benefit that will last for 100 years had been created.

**Liam McArthur:** I suggested that there is an important distinction between community-based projects and individual projects. They both deliver benefits for communities, but they deliver different

benefits. There is a global target of 500MW for community and individual projects, but will the minister give a breakdown of community projects as opposed to individual projects? Will he undertake to separate those two aspects when referring to the target in the future?

**Fergus Ewing:** I can come back to that point in the second, more full, debate that we will have on the issue later in the week. Of course, we support community benefit and community ownership. However, we aspire to community ownership and think that it is the best option possible. In the good practice principles, there are three options for the ownership of a project. It can be a joint-venture project, a shared-revenue project or a split-ownership project. Each of those arrangements is appropriate on various occasions, and flexibility is very much part of what we want to encourage.

CARES was mentioned, by Murdo Fraser in particular. I extol the practical benefits of CARES, which provides information, a start-up grant of up to £20,000 and framework contractors who support communities. Local energy Scotland has expert contractors who go around Scotland helping communities—they have great human skills, too, which help to navigate some of the differing views in communities.

CARES provides a pre-planning loan of up to £150,000, a development officer network—again, with local energy Scotland—and the CARES toolkit, with a community investment module. I have taken about a minute to mention those elements, but they represent thousands of hours of work. We encourage commercial developers to go for community ownership, which is a good thing.

The less positive news concerns the UK Government's attack on renewables. Reference was made to a report that says that renewables get more support than they should. However, the UK Government set the level of support not long ago, so it cannot have things both ways. In the time that I have, I cannot go over all the concerns that we have about the attack on feed-in tariffs, the inhibiting of the Green Investment Bank from supporting aggregated community projects and the removal of pre-accreditation, which is already creating uncertainty and confusion among investors.

The key message is that I think that almost all of us in this Parliament support community projects, and the frustration is that we fear that recent policy decisions in Westminster, which we might debate in more detail on another occasion, will inhibit and perhaps even block community projects, just when I sense that there is momentum behind such projects in Scotland, because more and more communities have seen that they work and deliver enormous benefits.

This is above politics. When the community energy movement is just beginning to gain unstoppable momentum, it would be tragic if the movement were stopped in its tracks because of a lack of support from Westminster. I hope that we can debate those matters later this week.

I commend Mike MacKenzie and all members who took part in the debate for their support for community energy in Scotland.

*Meeting closed at 17:50.*





This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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