

House of Commons St Andrews Day Adjournment Debate

“Scotland and Malawi Relations”

Monday 30th November 2015

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Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, or zikomo kwambiri and yewo chomene, as we would say in Chichewa and Tumbuka. I am very glad to have the opportunity to mark Scotland’s national day—the feast of St Andrew—with this debate on the enduring relationship between my country and the country known as the warm heart of Africa, the Republic of Malawi.

A number of distinguished guests are watching these proceedings, either from the Gallery or via the broadcast, including representatives from the Malawi high commission to the UK and the UK high commission to Malawi. You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that His Excellency the President Professor Peter Mutharika is also visiting the UK today, and I had the honour and pleasure of meeting him at a cross-party group meeting earlier. To all of them, I say: Kwa inu nonse a Malawi anzanga omwe mwabwera kuno, tikulandirani ndi manja awiri. You are all most welcome on this special occasion.

Earlier this month we marked the 10th anniversary of the formal co-operation agreement signed by the Governments of Malawi and Scotland in 2005, and in October the civil society network, the Scotland Malawi Partnership, held its 10th annual general meeting. Ten years of formal co-operation between the countries build on a legacy stretching back more than 150 years, to the time of Dr David Livingstone, who is rightly remembered for his opposition to the slave trade. His impact on Malawi is commemorated in the naming of its major commercial city, Blantyre, after his home town in Lanarkshire, the home of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier). Indeed, it is difficult to go anywhere in either Scotland or Malawi and not meet people, communities or organisations that have connections to the two countries.

My own connections also began slightly more than 10 years ago, when I travelled with the now sadly missed Scottish Churches World Exchange programme to the northern capital of Mzuzu. As a boy from Scotland’s highland capital, Inverness, I thought that was very fitting. I made my home there for the next 12 months, along with some fellow volunteers, and we were warmly welcomed by the community of St Peter’s cathedral parish and the school where we were to teach.

As is often the experience of teachers, I probably learned far more from my students than they learned from me. Perhaps the most important thing I learned—or at least the experience confirmed this for me—is that no matter where in the world we go, people are the same. I taught kids who were eager to learn, and I taught kids who just wanted to be outside playing football. I met mothers and fathers who wanted nothing but the best for their children. I met priests and sisters of great faith, and I met others who had left their ministry. I met locals propping up bars late at night, drinking the local Kuche Kuche brew and putting the world to rights, and I met farmers, bakers, shopkeepers, starting their early morning shifts—although I hasten to add that they were not all walking together.

What was different was the context. Malawi is one of the poorest countries on earth: it ranks 174th out of 187 countries in the United Nations human development index. Life expectancy at birth is just 55 years, and half of the population live below the national poverty line, but all of those statistics represent improvements on the situation 10 years ago.

The difference between Scotland and Malawi lies not in the desire or the ability of the people to build a better life for themselves, but in the opportunities they have to do so. What stands in the way of those

opportunities for people in Malawi is rarely the result of decisions taken in Malawi, but, rather, deep-rooted, structural causes that we in the west must take responsibility both for bringing about and for helping to bring to an end.

As we hold this debate today, world leaders are meeting in Paris for the climate change summit. Climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing people and the planet. It exacerbates the existing challenges of poverty, conflict, disease, resource depletion and population displacement.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on successfully securing this debate, and on his attendance when we met the President earlier today. Does he think that we in England also have a responsibility to make sure we are investing in Malawi? I know that part of the world incredibly well, and it is time we took a serious interest in it.

Patrick Grady: Yes, of course: the debate is on Scotland's relations with Malawi, but we recognise that there are bonds of friendship across the UK. The President expressed a number of useful comments and insights to the cross-party group, including on the importance of investment and, indeed, on the need for an agreement at the Paris summit. Malawi has been affected by climate changes, as have so many countries in that part of the world.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this timely debate. Does he agree that the Scottish Government's work on climate justice is particularly timely, especially with today's opening of the Paris climate talks, and that they are making good progress on it?

Patrick Grady: Yes. If I have time, I may say something about the climate justice fund towards the end of my remarks.

Other structures and factors exacerbate the challenge of global poverty. Tomorrow, we mark world AIDS day. HIV/AIDs is one of several totally preventable diseases that are still far too prevalent in countries such as Malawi. If developing countries are truly to control their own destiny, we must improve governance, strengthen civil society and, in particular, ensure that resources and capital generated in-country are allowed to stay in-country. His Excellency the President raised the issue of domestic resource mobilisation at today's meeting. We on the SNP Benches will pay particular attention to the forthcoming renegotiation of the Malawi UK tax treaty.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Just this year, one of the top Government officials in Malawi, Charles Msosa, principal secretary to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, issued a very stern warning against abuse of the latest aid package. Does the hon. Gentleman feel, as he does, that there should be a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of the aid package?

Patrick Grady: I absolutely agree. I have spoken of the need to enhance and strengthen the role of civil society in Malawi to help its people to hold the Government to account and to strengthen the structures of Malawi democracy itself. Indeed, those points were made at the cross-party group this morning.

His Excellency also spoke of the need to tackle gender inequality in his country. Of course, his immediate predecessor is one of only a handful of females ever to be a Head of State in Africa. There is no single silver bullet to end global poverty, but the empowerment and education of women and girls comes pretty close.

Many of my SNP colleagues have constituents who have a connection with Malawi. The Scotland Malawi Partnership, a network of nearly 700 organisations and key stakeholders, reckons that about 94,000 Scots are involved in partnership activities, while its sister organisation, the Malawi Scotland Partnership, estimates that 198,000 Malawians co-operate with friends and counterparts in Scotland.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that what particularly distinguishes the Malawi Scotland Partnership is the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the relationship? That is particularly evident in the more than 150 school-to-school connections, which are creating firm links of friendship and understanding between schools in Malawi and schools in my own constituency, such as Broughton high and Stockbridge primary schools.

Patrick Grady: I totally agree. Many constituents elsewhere will have similar stories to tell. The development of school partnerships has been a particular characteristic of the Scotland-Malawi relationship over the past 10 years. Indeed, the school I taught at in Mzuzu was one of the very first to establish such a relationship with what is now St Matthew's Academy in Saltcoats, which is ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson).

It would be particularly interesting to carry out some research into the long-term impact of these partnerships. How have they benefited young people from Scotland and Malawi who have visited each other's countries? What impact have these exchanges had on their career and life choices? It would be interesting to know whether the Minister might consider funding that kind of study.

Cultural links built on person-to-person connections are a hallmark of the relationship between Scotland and Malawi, but these are not always straightforward. The Minister will be aware that Malawians wishing to visit the UK—even, on some occasions, those sponsored by the British Council—can find it difficult to obtain a visa. Again, I would be interested to hear how the Government plan to respond to the concerns about that raised by civil society organisations.

Civil society connections are strengthened and enhanced by the formal co-operation agreement between the Governments of Scotland and Malawi. Signed in the aftermath of the Gleneagles summit in 2005, it commits the Governments to working together in the key areas of civic governance, sustainable economic development, health and education.

It is an agreement that has lived on through three First Ministers of Scotland and three Presidents of Malawi. I pay tribute to the work of Jack McConnell, who established the agreement as First Minister and who is now one of Malawi's strongest advocates in the House of Lords. Scotland's longest-serving—because he is the only one so far—International Development Minister, Humza Yousaf, has also championed the relationship. I know that his visit to Malawi in 2014 left a deep impression on him.

Over the years, the Scottish Government have invested more than £55 million in Malawi. That is in addition to Department for International Development investment and other UK investment, although I note that the Government like to count it towards the 0.7% official development assistance target. That funding has helped to quadruple the number of medical graduates in Malawi, ensured that 140,000 children have been prioritised for emergency treatment through a meningitis treatment programme, and brought new energy access to almost 80,000 people in the most rural parts of the country through a £2.3 million renewable energy programme.

I declare an interest because, before the election, I worked for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, which benefitted from the Scottish Government's innovative climate justice fund, to which my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) referred. The climate justice fund puts into reality the principle that we have done the most to cause climate change and people in developing countries such as Malawi have done the least but are being impacted first and hardest, by helping people to adapt and overcome the impacts of climate change. Last year, I saw at first hand the impact of that funding, which is helping communities in rural Malawi to overcome the effects of climate change through irrigation and sustainable agriculture projects.

I want briefly to pay tribute to two projects with which I have a personal connection. The first is the Eva Demaya centre, which was established by Jacqueline Kouwenhoven, who was initially from the

Netherlands, and her husband, Mr John Fox, who hails from Dumbarton. The centre provides a valuable and innovative mix of conventional western medicine alongside more traditional and complementary therapies in a remote area of the Rumphi district. Such is the esteem in which Jacqueline is held that the local community elected her as an independent member of the Malawian Parliament last year—the only woman in that august House. I hope that I can find a way to make a connection with her in my capacity as a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The inter-cultural exchanges and innovative approaches that such small projects engender are hallmarks of the interventions that have happened in Malawi, especially over the past 10 years under the formal Scotland Malawi Partnership. It has allowed a thousand flowers to bloom, as it were, and there are many lessons to be learned.

The second project is the Chesney Trust, which was founded by one of my fellow volunteers, Janet Chesney, who travelled out to Malawi with me in 2004 but has never found the will to leave for a significant length of time. She has dedicated herself to improving access to education in northern Malawi through the establishment of a girl's secondary school. Earlier today, she sent me a video of the pupils of that school singing Scotland's national anthem, just in time for St Andrew's day. I will endeavour to share that on social media so that you, Mr Speaker, and other Members can enjoy a clip that sums up the special relationship between Scotland and Malawi. I am grateful that you have chosen to remain in the Chair for this Adjournment debate, Mr Speaker. I know that you take a particular interest in matters of international development, as a former spokesperson on the subject.

In recognition of the girls learning the words to "Flower of Scotland", let me finish with the words of Malawi's national anthem. In Chichewa, it starts, "Mlungu dalitsani Malawi". In Tumbuka, it is, "Chiuta m'tumbike Malawi". In English, that is, "God bless Malawi". As I have time, the first verse is:

"O God bless our land of Malawi,
Keep it a land of peace.
Put down each and every enemy,
Hunger, disease, envy.
Join together all our hearts as one,
That we be free from fear.
Bless our leader, each and every one,
And Mother Malawi."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):

What a veritable challenge for *Hansard* some of those quotes will be. I hope that I will not be as challenging, although I wish I had had the foresight to prepare to be so.

This debate on Scotland-Malawi relations is timely. As has been mentioned, President Mutharika started an official visit to the UK this morning and will join the global African investment summit of the Daily Mail group later this week. I join the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) in offering a warm welcome to the President and his team, and I also wish him, and the vast array of Members who have come to support him, a happy St Andrew's day. No doubt they are reflecting the importance of the Malawi-Scotland relationship, as well as the high esteem in which he is held in his party and the House more generally.

I am delighted that today my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland met the Minister responsible for foreign affairs to reinforce the close relationship between Scotland and Malawi. I know that he has a long-standing interest in Malawi. I met the Malawian high commissioner to London and had a wide-ranging discussion.

Indeed, Malawi is a country close to my heart. My wife went to school in Malawi, and her father worked there. My brother-in-law, Patrick Thompson, was born in Lilongwe hospital. When I finally married my long-suffering wife, we decided to honeymoon in part in Lilongwe while travelling anti-clockwise around Zimbabwe. When I was on the Back Benches, I volunteered with a charity called the Grow Movement, which seeks to unlock the potential of entrepreneurs in Uganda, Rwanda and Malawi by matching them with business consultants who offer structured advice over the phone. Over 12 phone sessions, I helped a lady called Evelyn who was running a wonderful business in Malawi called Body Hugging Fashions—I felt I should get that into *Hansard*.

I was also temporarily vice-chair of the all-party group on Zambia and Malawi, and I know from the Malawian high commissioner and our high commissioner to Malawi, who I am sure is listening to this debate somewhere, that the President very much enjoyed meeting members of the group, and was pleased with the hospitality he was offered. It was much appreciated.

I am delighted that this debate is taking place. The UK has an historic and deep bilateral relationship with Malawi, and although the UK has overall responsibility for foreign affairs, within that broader framework there is a special relationship between Scotland and Malawi that we in this House should cherish. The debate in the Scottish Parliament on 11 November to mark the 10th anniversary of the Scotland and Malawi co-operation agreement set out the breadth of the links and relationship that Scotland has with Malawi, and the cross-party support that it enjoys.

In my mind there are three key components to the relationship between Scotland and Malawi. The first is the history. Scotland's part in the Malawi story is there for all to see. It is not just about the lives of explorers, missionaries, traders and doctors—and indeed teachers—from the past and present; it is built into the very fabric of Malawi. From the largest Malawian Protestant church with its Scottish roots, to some of the nation's most historic and impressive buildings, and the name of its largest city, Scotland's links with Malawi are very evident today.

Secondly, the links to people are still strong, and I pay tribute to the work of the Scotland Malawi Partnership and all it does to invigorate and build on historical links. I note that the hon. Gentleman lived and worked in Malawi. Indeed, I believe that we were in Malawi at the same time while I was honeymooning, although I did not get to the country's further reaches—that was my own failing, as I was keen to complete the circumference of Zimbabwe. Many others have also worked there. The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) referred to the connecting classrooms programme, and I am sure that the British Council would welcome her thoughts on research into the impact that that had and on how such projects could be taken forward.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): On the connecting classrooms programme, will the Minister join me in applauding the enterprise and enthusiasm of senior pupils from schools across East Renfrewshire who have just returned from Malawi where they spent a week painting schools and working in local communities, and cementing the bonds of friendship between our countries?

James Duddridge: I have no hesitation in congratulating those pupils on their excellent work, and I would love to find out more if the hon. Lady has some time to tell me about that programme and the work done by that school.

Oliver Colvile: Is my hon. Friend also aware that Plymouth St Andrew's has a very close relationship with Medic Malawi in Kasungu, and does an enormous amount to send people out to help them to develop their healthcare?

James Duddridge: A timely intervention. As my hon. Friend knows, my father-in-law is in his constituency, the same father-in-law who worked in Malawi. My hon. Friend is a governor of one school in Malawi. I do not know whether his intervention was a circuitous pitch for his involvement in another, but I am sure I

would welcome schools in Plymouth, East Renfrewshire and other places across the United Kingdom getting involved. It is important to develop links between people, so that the relationship will be as strong in the future as it has been in the past.

Our third link is governance. We are, of course, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the co-operation agreement set up by that great friend of Malawi, Lord Jack McConnell. I thank him for all the work he has put into the relationship over the years. The Scottish Parliament has an active partnership with the Malawian Parliament, and the Scottish Government have a respected development programme backed up with high-level visits in both directions—a very important point that was made earlier.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned climate change. The impact of climate change on the poorest Malawians is a problem of great magnitude that calls for efforts from all of us. DFID's £21 million enhancing community resilience programme supports individuals and communities in Malawi to mitigate the effects of climate change through small-scale irrigation, conservation, agricultural practices, and village savings and loans schemes, developing resilience so that when problems strike communities are ready to help themselves.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My hon. Friend will know about the disastrous floods in Malawi in January last year. We do not know what caused the floods, but it is probably because of climate change that they are becoming more frequent in that region. Does he therefore agree that for nations such as Malawi it is imperative we reach an agreement in Paris that will lead to a solution that will see less of this type of weather across Africa?

James Duddridge: As ever, my hon. and learned Friend hits the nail on the head. It is absolutely essential for any Paris agreement to acknowledge the changing situation that is having an impact on and adversely affecting countries such as Malawi. Early indications of progress in Paris are good, but there is still a long way to go.

Her Majesty's Government actively encourage the special bond that exists between Malawi and Scotland. The British high commission in Lilongwe brings together FCO and DFID staff who work with many Scots, Governments, individuals and other organisations who keep that bond alive. I am sure that our high commissioner will be open to further suggestions on how we can work together. The UK Government have supported visits to Malawi this year from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned problems with visas. He will appreciate that I cannot go into too much detail, and certainly not on individual cases, but I am open to suggestions on how the system can be improved. UK Visas and Immigration is responsible for making decisions each year on who has the right to stay. It is a difficult job that requires balance. Our immigration rules apply globally to every visa applicant. Statistics show that 85% of Malawian applications for visit visas made in the past year were issued. That is well above the global and regional average. Malawi is well placed in relation to visas being processed and accepted. Statistics on the time taken bear similar comparison to our targets, and to global and regional averages.

We recognise the important work still to be done. DFID in Scotland, in particular, is working incredibly hard. That work, driven not only from Malawi and London but from East Kilbride, makes the UK one of Malawi's largest development partners, in terms of the global impact of DFID's work. They are an excellent team, and one I have visited in the past.

The UK Government are committed to ensuring that every pound of UK aid money achieves its intended results, and we maintain a zero-tolerance approach to corruption. We are concerned, therefore, at the weaknesses in Malawi's financial management systems uncovered by the "cashgate" scandal, which saw the theft by politicians and civil servants of funds intended for the people of Malawi. That is why, in

concert with other donors, we decided to stop providing financial aid directly to the Malawian Government in November 2013.

It is important to note, however, that although we cannot work through the governance system, the UK continues to work with the Government and the Malawian people, and our support is significant. We operate an £80 million bilateral aid programme—up from £64 million in 2014-15—with significant other UK support benefiting Malawi, including, for example, through civil society, research, the global funds and multilateral channels.

Scotland's, and indeed the UK's, relationship with Malawi involves being there when Malawi faces difficult times. Unfortunately, difficult times have been all too common. DFID recently mobilised to provide £4.1 million to help address the devastating floods, which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) mentioned, in January and released a further £10 million in October to alleviate the desperate food shortages facing nearly 3 million people. In addition, contingency planning is in place for this year's likely El Niño.

Malawi's future needs to move beyond a heavy reliance on aid. Malawi must stimulate the creation of growth, markets, jobs and incomes for all its citizens. To this end, the Government are working with the Malawian Government to improve the business environment and the diversification and development of its export market. We strongly support the President's attempts to reform the economy and public services to bring about the change necessary to rebalance the Malawian economy—from one heavily supported by donors and reliant on the state to one more driven by private sector investment and entrepreneurship, as I saw from Evelyn and others in the country.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I congratulate the Minister on paying tribute to my constituency and DFID's work there, and I, too, congratulate them. Does he agree on the importance of champions for women's small business enterprises in Malawi and across the developing world and of investment in opportunities for business ventures for women?

James Duddridge: I do agree. It has been my experience, particularly in Malawi, that women within families can be the most entrepreneurial of individuals. Sometimes, however, it is not recognised even within their own communities that they are the underlying businesses drivers and income producers. We need to provide more support to smaller businesses as they get bigger. Transitioning from that micro-entrepreneurship to larger, more formalised, tax-paying and employment-generating activity is exactly the right way forward, and I am sure that Malawian women, as African women, will be at the forefront of that, leaving the men sadly behind.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that this is a partnership, not a one-way relationship. Malawi is a vibrant country with a warm heart in the middle of Africa, renowned throughout the region as a land of peace in a sometimes troubled neighbourhood. A democracy with a staunchly free press, Malawi has been a good friend to Scotland and the UK, and we are keen to support it in the years to come. Malawian soldiers, for example, play a valuable and respected role as peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, having been trained by our own armed forces. The Malawian diaspora contributes enormously to many areas of life in the UK, including in Scotland. Let us remember that, for all its challenges, Malawi inspires many people in Scotland and throughout the UK, and, thanks to the hon. Member for Glasgow North, we rightly celebrate that relationship today.

Question put and agreed to.