

APPG FOR INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

AGM MINUTES

Wednesday February 24th, 2021

1. Apologies

Jim Shannon MP opened the meeting by conveying the apologies of those who contacted the group to say that they could not attend:

- The Bishop of Carlisle
- Tom Tugendhat MP
- Mark Menzies MP
- Lord Suri
- Stephen Timms MP
- Lord Singh

The acceptance of these apologies was proposed by Fiona Bruce MP and seconded by Sir Peter Bottomley MP.

2. Welcome

Jim Shannon welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked APPG members and staff for their contributions throughout the last year to protecting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). He then welcomed the new APPG Parliamentary Officer – Nancy Fleming.

3. 2020 Overview

Jim Shannon then proceeded to outline some highlights of the APPG's work in 2020 such as:

- Fiona Bruce MP's appointment as the PM's Special Envoy for FoRB.
- The APPG's growth to 132 members.
- The APPG's work to ensure that the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's review of the FCO's work to support persecuted Christians are implemented.
- The publication of the APPG's report 'Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide'.
- The adoption of several recommendations from the APPG's 2019 Pakistan Report.
- The APPG's work to highlight the impact of covid-19 on religious and belief communities.

There were no comments from attendees on this work.

4. Fiona Bruce MP Remarks

Fiona Bruce discussed her work and the work of the APPG briefly before mention the concerns raised to her by the Bishop of Truro about FoRB in Nepal. She mentioned that they have both travelled to Nepal in the past and are very concerned about changes to the Nepalese constitution and penal laws that criminalise blasphemy and conversion. She called for a short inquiry and report on this issue utilising the Bishop of Truro's contacts. Lord Alton mentioned that the very first international visit he did as an MP was to Nepal and he proposed acceptance of this inquiry which was seconded by Brendan O'Hara MP. Lord Alton also suggested meeting the Nepalese Ambassador to present the APPG as an ally rather than a critical outsider.

5. Election of Officers

Lord Alton proposed that Jim Shannon MP, Baroness Cox and Preet Gill MP continue as the Chair and Co-Chairs of the APPG respectively. This was unanimously seconded.

Baroness Cox then proposed the election of the following officers:

- Lord Singh (Vice-Chair)
- Lord Suri (Vice-Chair)
- Lord Alton (Vice-Chair)
- Baroness Anelay (Vice-Chair)
- Fiona Bruce MP (Vice-Chair)
- Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP (Vice-Chair)
- George Howarth MP (Vice-Chair)
- Brendan O'Hara MP (Vice-Chair)
- Christian Matheson MP (Vice-Chair)
- Alexander Stafford MP (Vice-Chair)
- Tommy Sheppard MP (Vice-Chair)
- Imran Ahmad Khan MP (Vice-Chair)

This was unanimously seconded. Finally, Fiona Bruce MP proposed Lisa Cameron MP as Treasurer of the group. This was seconded by Lord Alton.

6. Review of Old Motions

- To delegate authority to APPG Chair and Co-Chairs to sign off any necessary APPG press releases, written documents and public statements on FoRB issues that will represent the APPG's views.
- Phil Grundy (web-designer) is to be allowed to use the creative design of the APPG website for advertising purposes of his business. The APPG received gift of creative intellectual property from Phil Grundy, with thanks.

These motions were proposed for acceptance by Baroness Cox and seconded by Lord Alton.

7. Review of New Motions

- To reappoint Lee Scott, Addo Accounting as our Accountant.
- To reinstate Co-op Bank as the Banking Group of the APPG and pass all the associated resolutions as per the Co-op "Section 2: Declaration" document.
- To allow signatories to the account to continue with all the powers outlined in the Co-op "Section 2: Declaration" document.
- To establish an APPG Instagram page alongside the pre-existing APPG twitter to expand the APPG's public reach.

These were proposed for acceptance by Baroness Cox and seconded by Brendan O'Hara MP.

8. Review of APPG Income and Expenditure Statement

Income and Expenditure Statement for All-Party Parliamentary Groups

Group Name International Freedom of Religion or Belief

Period Covered Feb 20 - Feb 21

A. Balance Brought Forward from Previous year 18,586

B. Income received during the year

Membership subscriptions (parliamentarians) 0

Monetary Donations (including external subscriptions and sponsorships) 42,725

Trading Income 0

Interest Received 41

Other 0

Total 42,766

C. Expenditure during the year:

i. Employment costs (salaries, NI, pensions costs) 37,149

ii. Costs of contractors and freelance staff 4,982

iii. Visits and events (UK) 45

iv. Visits and events (abroad) 0

v. Cost of generating income 0

vi. Office and communications costs	512
vii. Other (Website, Misc & Events Costs)	619
TOTAL expenditure	43,307
D. Balance carried forward	18,046

Benefits in Kind				
Source	Description	Value £s In bands of £1,500	Received	Registered
National Public Affairs Council of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	Administrative assistance for APPG members From: 05/02/2020 To: 31/03/2020	1,501- 3,000	05/02/2020	01/07/2020
National Public Affairs Council of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	Administrative assistance for APPG members From: 01/07/2020 To: 04/02/2021	4,501- 6,000	01/07/2020	01/07/2020

Amro Hussain, APPG Director, explained that the APPG's funding comes from faith based and other NGOs who support the group's work through a monthly contribution. He further explained that nearly all of that funding received annually is spent on staff costs.

Brendan O'Hara MP proposed acceptance of the Income and Expenditure Statement and this was seconded by Baroness Cox.

9. Discussion of Potential Work for the Year

Amro Hussain introduced a draft strategy document for 2021 to the APPG members. The document, which was based on discussions with members and stakeholders, outlines country and thematic priorities for the APPG, goals for the year and tools to achieve those goals.

Baroness Cox thanked Amro and mentioned Burkino Faso as a country area of focus which has been neglected. Lord Alton supported Baroness Cox's suggestion to focus more on Africa. He mentioned that Leah Sharibu has been in captivity in Nigeria for 3 years and then raised FoRB issues in Cameroon, Ethiopia and other African nations. He also suggested the APPG take note of the House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee report on sub-Saharan Africa.

Brendan O' Hara raised concerns about the plight of the Uighur community in China and suggested collaboration with the APPG for Uighurs and other organisations to bring this issue into the public consciousness. In support of this point, Lord Alton mentioned the debate on the Genocide amendment to the Trade Bill which would be returning to the House of Commons.

Amro Hussain then suggested that members send a draft letter to sympathetic colleagues to invite them to join the APPG. Lord Alton requested a list of current members so that people who have already joined are not contacted twice.

10. AOB

Amro Hussain mentioned that the APPG was planning to publish a report in the coming days entitled 'Commentary on the State of Freedom of Religion or Belief 2020'. He encouraged members to review the report and he requested approval from members for the planned timeline.

The timeline was proposed for acceptance by Baroness Cox and seconded by Lord Alton.

Amro Hussain then mentioned that organisations such as Amnesty International UK had suggested the potential of collaborating on joint online events. He requested permission to pursue such collaboration. This was proposed for acceptance by Brendan O Hara MP and unanimously accepted.

To end, Baroness Cox thanked Amro Hussain for all his hard work. Jim Shannon MP thanked the whole team, members and stakeholders. Brendan O'Hara MP and the other members thanked Jim for his work as Chair. Jim Shannon MP closed the meeting.