

Cross-Party Group on international development

17 September 1800 – 1930

Minute

Present

MSPs

Sarah Boyack MSP
Maggie Chapman MSP

Invited guests

Esther Xosei
Cllr Graham Campbell
Sandra Kwikiriza
Emily MacDonald Thomas

Non-MSP Group Members

Cathy Crawford; Sara Davies; Ann Simpson, University of St Andrews; Fionn McArdle, Hamish Goldie-Scot, Engineering Outcomes; Benjamin Carey, Carey Tourism; Yaya Marin Coleman, United Black Association for Development Educational Foundation Belize; David Kenvyn, ACTSA; Daniel Shephard, Moray House; Olivia Rosso, Moray House; Zahra Prasetyo, Moray House; Faye Watson, University of Edinburgh; Ellen MacRae, University of Edinburgh; Nikita Kasamchandani, University of Edinburgh; Eddie Nicholls, Scottish Parliament; Maia Madani Davies, University of Edinburgh

Apologies

John Mason MSP

Agenda item 1 - Welcome

Sarah Boyack MSP opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Sarah introduced the focus of the meeting – Why and how Scotland should acknowledge and redress historic and ongoing injustices perpetuated by colonialism.

The minutes from the last meeting were agreed.

Agenda item 2 - Discussion

Frances Guy, chief executive, Scotland's International Development Alliance was invited to say a few words about their recent report 'From talk to Transformation, how governments can really shift the power towards global justice'. Frances mentioned that the report recommends reparative and restorative justice and that basic steps to acknowledge historic and ongoing injustices are needed. She mentioned that some UK cities including Edinburgh and Glasgow had gone some way in making public apologies, and this is but a first step, but the Scottish Parliament has not yet made this step.

Sarah introduced Esther Xosei, reparations legal expert.

Esther began by emphasizing the importance of implementing the recommendations of SIDA's latest report and learning from good practices. As a reparationsist advocating for Pan-African reparations, she underscored the need to rebalance power structures and wealth flows, addressing the extraction of resources from Africa and the Global South that continues today. She critiqued the coloniality embedded in reparatory justice programs, particularly the ways they can marginalise and deprioritise the lived experiences of African and African-descended people.

She elaborated on how colonial logics continue to commodify human beings, labour, knowledge, and space, and how even the notion of finite financial compensation reinforces these colonial legacies. Esther argued that reparations focused solely on financial transactions would not achieve global justice. She called for a broader understanding of the interconnectedness between Europe's wealth and the impoverishment of the Global South, a relationship that perpetuates ongoing wealth extraction.

Esther also raised concerns about the co-option of reparatory justice movements by elites—academic, political, and business—and the resulting marginalisation of those most affected by these injustices. She pointed to the example of Germany and Namibia, where reparations agreements were negotiated without the participation of the affected communities, leading to legal actions against the Namibian government. This demonstrated the danger of "State Capture" in reparations processes.

In the UK, Esther noted that the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for African Reparations was established due to grassroots concerns that reparations discussions were being dominated by state actors who overlooked the long histories of activism in African and Caribbean communities. She advocated for a bottom-up approach, including a global truth and reparatory justice commission to facilitate dialogue between affected communities and the UK state as advocated by the Stop the Maangamizi Campaign and supported by the APPG for African Reparations. Esther highlighted the opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to lead on implementing this proposal, ensuring that the reparations conversation is not monopolised by a small group of individuals.

Sarah introduced Sandra Kwikiriza, a Ugandan queer feminist, and a human rights defender, joining the meeting online.

Sandra emphasised the importance of acknowledging the historic harms caused by colonialism, particularly in its imposition of punitive legal systems that targeted LGBTQ+ communities. Before colonisation, many African societies had more fluid understandings of gender and sexuality, but colonial governments introduced laws that criminalised same-sex relationships and non-binary identities, creating a legacy of violence, stigma, and discrimination that persists today.

She argued that recognising these injustices is a crucial step towards cultural restoration. Restoring the history of more diverse gender roles through reparations and commemorative efforts could empower African LGBTQ+ communities by reconnecting them with indigenous knowledge and cultural pride. In her experience in Uganda, she observed how the phrase "un-African" is used to justify homophobia, even though these views were introduced by colonialism.

Sandra said that reparations are not just financial—they also involve restoring dignity. African LGBTQ+ communities could benefit from reparations funding for care services, legal reforms, and social welfare structures. Reparations could help challenge the colonial legacy that promotes bigotry, discrimination, and marginalization. She highlighted the current challenges, such as the reintroduction of anti-homosexuality laws in Uganda and similar developments in countries like Ghana and Kenya.

Educational campaigns funded by reparations could help change mindsets, and memorials or truth commissions could create a powerful form of visibility and recognition for LGBTQ+ communities. Sandra called for addressing the intersecting oppressions of racial, economic, and gender injustice, arguing that addressing these issues through reparations would advance broader social justice goals.

Finally, Sandra stressed that reparations are not just about addressing the past but ensuring that colonising nations and formerly colonised communities move forward on equal footing. Acknowledging this history through tangible actions would have a profound psychological and social impact, especially for marginalised communities, demonstrating a genuine commitment to justice, healing, and equality.

Sarah introduced Councillor Graham Campbell.

Graham began by acknowledging Scotland's role in colonialism and slavery, stressing the need for the country to confront its historical involvement. He referenced the common narrative in Scotland that colonialism and slavery were primarily English issues, but emphasised that Scots were disproportionately involved in every stage of the transatlantic slave trade. He described this as the longest and most significant criminal act in history, with Scots playing a significant role.

While acknowledging Esther's concern about quantifying reparations, Graham argued that it is necessary to calculate the financial impact of colonialism. He shared his experience of working in Glasgow to engage the Caribbean community in reparations discussions, emphasizing the differing perspectives between Africans from the continent and African-Caribbeans. For many Africans, the immediate issue of racism in Scottish society is more pressing than discussions about reparations.

Graham highlighted the 2015 Glasgow University study on the legacy of slavery, which resulted in the institution's acknowledgment of its colonial past. However, he expressed concern about elite institutions benefiting from this acknowledgment without truly addressing the deeper issues. He emphasised that the study of reparatory justice must include legal strategies to achieve justice in courts, as the ongoing legacy of colonialism continues to affect African communities.

He advocated for a process of acknowledgment, atonement, and reparations, arguing that apologies should come at the end of this process. Graham said that Scotland should take a leading role within the UK in reparatory justice efforts, including returning cultural artifacts and addressing the psychological and economic harm caused by colonialism. He also supported quantifying the damage done, citing studies that estimate the value of wealth extracted through slavery, and suggested that Scotland could begin a journey of reparatory justice by aligning itself with development goals set by African and Caribbean nations.

He concluded by calling for a comprehensive commitment to reparatory justice that includes analysing ongoing harms, returning cultural artifacts, and engaging with African and Caribbean communities to shape a reparatory strategy that is equitable and just.

Agenda item 3 – Q&A

Sarah Boyack asked what speakers thought the first steps would be for us in Scotland.

Graham emphasised the importance of decolonising Scotland's education system, focusing on integrating a broader historical context into the curriculum. He advocated for making knowledge examinable, starting at primary school, so that subjects like science and mathematics reflect their diverse historical origins. This approach would require reforming the Curriculum for Excellence, moving it towards a more prescriptive model to ensure that anti-racist, decolonised content is taught consistently across councils. Graham noted that current teaching often lacks depth on Scotland's racist history, and he argued against using outdated materials like "Of Mice and Men" that perpetuate racial insensitivity in classrooms. He also mentioned that while Glasgow has made progress, much depends on individual councils and teachers, leading to inconsistencies in delivering this essential content.

Esther echoed the emphasis on education but expanded its definition to include grassroots knowledge and alternative epistemologies. She highlighted the importance of understanding the legacy of events like the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference, which carved up Africa, as well as the role of colonial institutions, like the University of the West Indies, in perpetuating these legacies. Esther stressed that decolonising education means recognising non-Eurocentric knowledge systems, particularly those from Africa and the African diaspora. She critiqued the current academic framework for being detached from the realities of oppressed peoples and

promoted initiatives like the Pan-Afrikan Reparations Internationalist Standing Conference, which aims to bring together communities affected by the lingering borders of colonialism at the Afrika and Europe People to Peoples Planet Repairs Action Dialogue (Berlin Repairs Conference) taking place in Berlin in November.

Sandra expanded on the need to decolonise formal education, but she placed equal importance on informal, ancestral learning passed down through folklore, songs, and oral traditions. She pointed out that African cultural erasure, especially through colonial education systems and religion, has distorted perceptions of African identities. As an example, she noted how colonialism has skewed perspectives on African sexuality and same-sex relationships. Sandra argued that decolonisation should include reconnecting with African cultural roots, but she stressed that the burden should not fall on the oppressed to educate their colonisers. Instead, awareness must be raised to recognise the links between colonialism and current neocolonial systems, which perpetuate inequality and cultural erasure.

Flynn Mccardle asked how do we drive cross country engagement on the issue of reparation, particularly with regard to young people.

Esther said that reparations should be understood as a legal principle driven from the grassroots, not just by governments or judges. Reparations movements have existed for centuries, with many suffering persecution. My research in the UK shows how African figures like Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano championed these causes in the 18th century.

Reparations campaigns, like the African Reparations Movement founded by Bernie Grant MP, have come at great personal cost, including assassinations, such as Nigeria's Chief Abiola, who was killed for supporting reparations. It's important to remember these movements' sacrifices and create platforms for dialogue. Conferences like the UK Afrikan Reparations Conference in October and the Berlin Reparations Conference are essential spaces for discussions, allowing various strategies and perspectives to be explored. We must listen, learn from history, and ensure that reparations are addressed with humility and awareness of the struggles that have shaped these movements.

Graham said that we need better education on Africa's history and geography; too many people still think Africa is a country. This ignorance highlights a failure in our education system. Initiatives like decolonial museums, such as the one on the Berlin Conference site, are vital in addressing these gaps.

Young people have access to more resources, but the key is providing well-researched, verifiable information. The emotional impact of learning about slavery's brutality must be considered. Just as we observe Holocaust Memorial Day, we should recognize the significance of August 1st, the date slavery was abolished in the British Empire.

Cities and museums have made progress, such as Aberdeen's well-curated exhibits on local links to slavery, but we can do more. Popular and accessible formats, like graphic novels, can help engage wider audiences. Scholars should make their work more available to the public, and we must ensure our museums offer useful, thought-provoking experiences.

Sandra said that communities already affected by colonialism, including young people, are deeply engaged in reparations discussions. Whether at family or community levels, intergenerational conversations are ongoing. The burden shouldn't fall on the oppressed to educate others. Instead, people in places like Scotland should take responsibility for their learning.

While there is extensive research on reparations, much of it requires validation from predominantly white institutions, perpetuating other systems of oppression. Social media provides an accessible platform where young people are already mobilising. In Kenya, for instance, social media campaigns against femicide have had a huge impact, proving that youth are leading critical movements.

These conversations are happening across the continent, even without formal recognition. Young people are immersed in this work, and their voices are crucial to these discussions. Social media's power to spread information globally, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, should be harnessed for the reparations movement.

Benjamin Carey asked what should what could the Scottish Parliament do?

YaYa Marin Coleman, a community worker and journalist from Belize, challenged everyone to reflect on their true motivations for engaging in discussions about reparations. She spoke about the ongoing harm of colonialism and capitalism, asking if people genuinely care about African descendants or are just engaging in performative actions. Marin Coleman underscored the need for honesty, accountability, and meaningful change, urging people to move beyond apologies and ensure real transformation, or else question their involvement in such spaces.

Graham highlighted Scotland's slow but growing journey toward reparations, with many universities and councils acknowledging their role in colonialism. However, he stressed that apologies without behavioural change are meaningless. He suggested redirecting the international solidarity budget to reparations and addressing ongoing harm, such as Scotland's involvement in African oil extraction and the trade of Congolese minerals. He argued that Scotland's Parliament, even within its limited power, must use resources meaningfully and align its economic activities with reparative actions. Graham urged for a systemic change in how Scotland engages with global inequalities, calling for government procurement to prioritise ethical sourcing.

Esther talked about the importance of Scotland establishing a Commission of Inquiry on reparatory justice, offering a model where Westminster struggles. Such a commission would provide concrete solutions, helping to address historical and ongoing global inequalities caused by slavery and colonisation. She tied reparations to environmental and cognitive justice; known as Planet Repairs, linking colonisation, slavery, and ecological crises. She mentioned her involvement in movements like Extinction Rebellion and explained how reparations are intertwined with redressing climate injustices.

Sandra said that a public apology from Scotland is a critical first step toward reparations. She compared it to acknowledging a problem in medicine, noting that recognition is half the solution. While understanding the limitations of individual influence on state actions, she argued that a Scottish apology would pressure the British government and other former colonial powers to follow suit. However, she stressed that an apology must be followed by meaningful action. A formal apology would provide something tangible to hold the Scottish Parliament accountable, paving the way for further reparative measures.

Sarah thanked the speakers. She suggested connecting with the Scottish Youth Parliament and NUS to further the conversation and also to feed into the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Agenda item 4 – HEF update

Sarah introduced Emily MacDonald Thomas from the Humanitarian Emergency Fund (HEF).

Sarah explained the role of the HEF in responding to global crises. The Scottish Government allocates £1 million annually to the HEF, which supports emergency relief efforts through a panel of eight humanitarian organisations. In 2024, the fund was activated to address food insecurity in Malawi, displacement in South Sudan, and flooding in Kenya, providing emergency cash assistance, water, and sanitation services. Emily also highlighted Scotland's new £1 million allocation for loss and damage funding, supporting climate justice in the Global South. She stressed the ongoing need for humanitarian funding, especially given the global shortfall, as only 30% of the UN's \$49 billion humanitarian aid requirement has been met for 2024.

Slides available here: <https://intdevalliance.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/HEF-Humanitarian-Update-for-Holyrood-CPG-September-2024.pptx>

Sarah thanked Emily.

Agenda item 5 – Closing remarks

Sarah thanked all the speakers. She confirmed that the next meeting will be on 19th November and we hope to share the initial findings into the inquiry on the transparency of international development funding by the Scottish Government. The next meeting will also discuss COP29. Any ideas about future speakers or topics, get in touch with Louise at SIDA.