

Minutes: British Council APPG AGM

16th May 2023, 11:00-12:00

Attendees: John Baron MP, Virendra Sharma MP, Catherine West MP, Fabian Hamilton MP, Dan Carden MP, Mark Logan MP, Lord Brennan, Lord Wigley, Nav Mishra MP, Benjamin Yates, Ruth Loeffler (British Council), David Thompson (British Council).

Apologies: Stephen Kinnock MP, Flick Drummond MP, Karen Bradley MP, Baroness Bonham-Carter, Baroness Smith (of Newnham), Baroness Suttie, Lord Watson, Baroness Northover, Lord Bach.

1. Welcome - APPG Chair John Baron welcomed attendees and outlined the purpose of the meeting.

2. Election of Officers

2.1 The following officers were elected:

Role	Name	Party
Chair and Registered Contact	John Baron MP	Conservative
Treasurer	Stephen Kinnock MP	Labour
Vice Chair (East Asia)	Mark Logan MP	Conservative
Vice Chair (South Asia)	Virendra Sharma MP	Labour
Vice Chair (MENA)	Flick Drummond MP	Conservative
Vice Chair (MENA)	Lord Brennan	Conservative
Vice Chair (Americas)	Karen Bradley MP	Conservative
Vice Chair (Latin America)	Baroness Bonham-Carter	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (SSA)	Baroness Northover	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (Europe)	Baroness Smith (of Newnham)	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (Wider Europe)	Baroness Suttie	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (Australia / New Zealand)	Lord Watson	Labour
Vice Chair	Baroness Thornton	Labour
Vice Chair	Catherine West MP	Labour
Vice Chair	Fabian Hamilton MP	Labour
Vice Chair	Nav Mishra MP	Labour
Vice Chair	Lord Bach	Labour
Vice Chair	Dan Carden MP	Labour

3. Income and expenditure

3.1 APPG members agreed the previous year's accounts.

4. Comments from the Chair

4.1 APPG Chair John Baron gave a brief overview of British Council's position and activity over the past year, noting that the three-year funding settlement from the FCDO has provided stability.

4.2 He thanked members of the APPG for their help and assistance throughout the Spending Review period.

4.3 The Chair cited the British Council delegation to Japan, as well as the International School Awards and the Five Films for Freedom events held in Parliament as just a few of the events that have happened over the course of the year.

4.4 The Chair then finished the update by introducing David Thompson, British Council Head of Political Engagement, to give an overview on both the progress of contractors in Afghanistan, and the situation in Sudan.

5. Update from British Council Head of Political Engagement, David Thompson

5.1 Head of Political Engagement, David Thompson, gave an update on the British Council contractors in Afghanistan where guidance has been changed to allow contractors to continue their applications for Pathway 3 of the ACRS from a different country. A small number of contractors have now made it to the UK, with others crossing the border out of Afghanistan. However, progress remains slow and the British Council continues to work with the Foreign Office to expedite the relocations process.

6. Q&A on Afghanistan

6.1 The Chair opened up questions and asked whether there was more to be done to raise awareness of the issues here and about the status of the business case referenced in a letter from Lord Ahmad of 14 April 2023. This was said to be with the FCDO awaiting ministerial sign off.

6.2 Lord Brennan asked a question on whether Tajikistan would accept contractors as a neighbouring country, and David responded that this was a possibility although other routes out of the country remained a priority.

6.3 Catherine West asked whether the APPG could support others who are raising awareness of the situation. Fabian Hamilton asked whether there was a channel of communication for contractors who had been in touch with their MPs, to which David Thompson said that British Council staff in the Policy & External Relations team would be able to help field enquiries.

7. Update on British Council in Sudan

7.1 Head of Political Engagement, David Thompson, outlined the challenging situation in Sudan, including the difficulties faced by civilians trying to flee the fighting and the likely protracted nature of the conflict. The British Council continues to have regular Incident Management meetings and is prioritising staff safety, both for those who had fled and those who remain in Khartoum.

7.2 APPG Chair John Baron wished to convey his, and those of the rest of the APPG members, best wishes to those in Sudan.

8. Q&A and AOB

8.1 APPG Chair opened up questions on the above, and on any other business.

8.2 Lord Brennan asked whether the British Council was still present in Iraq, which he had visited recently. David Thompson answered that the British Council is active in Iraq and referenced the recent visit by Chief Executive, Scott McDonald. The British Council team will set up a meeting between Lord Brennan and the Country Director in the coming weeks to talk through more of our activity in the country.

8.3 The Chair thanked British Council staff for their continued efforts and looked forward to another year ahead.

9. Close

May 2023