

Minutes Cross Party Group

On the

Middle East and South Asia

21 April 2015, Committee Room 1, Scottish Parliament

MSPs Present:

Hanzala Malik MSP (Convener)

Anne McTaggart MSP

All Others Present:

Umbreen Khalid - (Secretary)

Bob Haddow – UK Filter

Goran Zangana - Individual

Jack Feinmann – Individual

Eddie Holmes – Individual

Apologies:

Michael McMahon MSP

Dr Crispin Bates – Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh

Dr Patricia Jeffrery - University of Edinburgh

1. Matter arising from previous minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved with no amendments.

2. Machine Readable Passports in Pakistan Consulate, Glasgow

Hanzala Malik MSP reported that he had been corresponding with the Pakistan Consulate in Glasgow and the Government of Pakistan regarding the lack of suitable technology for issuing machine readable passports (MRP) in Scotland. Currently, people residing in Scotland need to go to London or Bradford to get an MRP issued. Mr Malik hopes that the issue will be resolved in the near future but no exact timeframe was indicated by the Government of Pakistan to date. However, the Chief Minister of Punjab, Shabaz Shariff, has made a personal commitment to getting the issue resolved.

3. Update on Kurdistan Region sub-group

The Sub-group has drafted a newsletter that gave an update on the constantly changing situation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq regarding the refugee situation and the fighting between the Peshmerga forces and Daesh (formerly referred to as Islamic State or ISIS). The newsletter was approved by the group and Mr Malik stated that he would give a copy to the Scottish parliament Information Centex (SPICe) for their record.

4. Friendship visits

Mr Malik reported that he was still in discussions about a friendship visit to Pakistan. He had also been approached by the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) 'Peace in Kurdistan', a London based human rights organisation who wanted to know if any MSPs wished to join a delegation of Westminster MPs to observe the Turkish Elections in June 2015. A Kurdish political party, the People's Democratic Party (HDP) are likely to get beyond the 10% vote threshold for gaining representation in the Turkish Parliament for the first time in history; therefore it was felt that international observers were important to ensure a free and fair election. At the time of the meeting Mr Malik did not know whether the organisation had funding for the airfares. He agreed to circulate more information to the MSPs in the Cross Party Group on the details of planned visit.