

## **INTERNATIONAL OVERVIEW: 1 JULY-31 DECEMBER 2017**

### **Executive summary**

1. The purpose of this paper is to outline core international work undertaken by the Scottish Parliament in the period July-December 2017. The International Strategy agreed by the SPCB in January 2017 stated that the International Relations Office (IRO) would produce a twice yearly overview of such activity.

### **Issues and options**

2. The IRO is responsible for the development and implementation of the International Strategy. While it facilitates the majority of inward and outward international visits it is not involved in every visit to or from the Parliament e.g. those undertaken by committees as part of an inquiry or by MSPs on cross party groups. This paper therefore does not reflect all of the Parliament's international activity, only that facilitated by the IRO.
3. The revised International Strategy agreed in January 2017 built on the experiences and practices applied by the Parliament in developing its international relations. While its central purpose is largely the same as before, i.e. linking to the Strategic Plan as well as highlighting work with other parliaments and through organisations such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, it now seeks to better detail, report and publicise actual activity.
4. The continued link to the priorities of the Strategic Plan has allowed IRO to better plan outward activity, which in turn has led to a more efficient linking to resources. In short, the Parliament can more easily identify what it wants to do, why, and when. For example, recent outward (and foreseeable future) activity has focussed on parliamentary reform, a key priority of the Parliament as set out in the Strategic Plan.

### **Countries/parliaments/organisations**

5. At Annex A is an infographic showing inward and outward visits that took place in the period 1 July - 31 December 2017, while Annexes B and C provide a visual breakdown for inwards.
6. Some narrative on specific work is set out below.

#### **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Scotland Branch**

7. Scotland Branch members undertook the following CPA supported activities (the reports of each of these activities are available on the IRO webpage):

- Ash Denham MSP attended a three-day workshop in Entebbe, Uganda to raise awareness of modern slavery, share good practice between parliaments and develop networks of legislators committed to tackling modern slavery across the Commonwealth and beyond
- The CPA in partnership with the Nova Scotia House of Assembly held the first conference bringing together over 30 Commonwealth parliamentarians with disabilities, carers and parliamentary officials from eight of the nine CPA regions. Jeremy Balfour MSP attended the conference, which provided opportunities to network and share experiences, best practice and innovations with other Commonwealth legislatures, designed to support participation in political and public life
- Margaret Mitchell MSP attended a meeting of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee in London
- Kate Forbes MSP attended the 14th CPA Canadian Parliamentary Seminar which sought to complement existing professional development programmes for parliamentarians. The Seminar is only open to newly elected Members
- Jamie Greene MSP participated as a member of a British Isles and Mediterranean Region team at an induction Seminar for new MLAs in the Falkland Islands. A series of workshops were arranged for new and re-elected MLAs focussing on all aspects of representation, scrutiny and oversight and parliamentary practice and procedure
- Elaine Smith MSP attended the CPA International Executive Committee (IEC) meeting which took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh as a BIMR representative. The Commonwealth Plenary Conference took place immediately after the IEC meeting which James Dornan MSP attended as a delegate

#### British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA)

8. The Scottish Parliament has, along with the other devolved parliaments and assemblies, five 'Full' Members and four 'Associate' Members on BIPA. As in all other Sessions, one of the Deputy Presiding Officers acts as leader of the delegation and its representative on the Steering Committee. In Session 5, Linda Fabiani MSP was chosen as delegation leader. The four other Full Members are: Willie Coffey MSP, John Scott MSP, Mark Griffin MSP and Ross Greer MSP while the Associate Members are: Gordon MacDonald MSP, James Dornan MSP, Pauline McNeill MSP and Maurice Golden MSP.
9. During the reporting period there were two plenary sessions, in Kilkenny, Ireland, and in Liverpool. In addition, the DPO attended a meeting of the Steering Committee in the Parliament of Jersey (States Assembly) and John Scott MSP took part in a visit to Brussels with colleagues on Committee B (European Affairs) as part of its Brexit inquiry.

## Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)

10. The Parliament has developed a strong relationship with the WFD over recent years. Initially this focus was on its Western Balkans programme and parliamentary financial oversight leading to the Financial Scrutiny Unit's work with the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in establishing its own parliamentary budget office.
11. This was a positive outcome from the Parliament's participation in discussions focussed on the benefits of robust budget oversight and promoted our reputation as a role model on this issue. The establishment of this budget office as a fully functioning 'centre of excellence' can be used by the Serbian Parliament and the WFD to showcase best financial oversight practices to other Western Balkan members.
12. There has been an increase in the WFD's parliamentary strengthening programmes, resulting in an increase in the number of WFD supported visits to Edinburgh. While many of these might be regarded as 'one off' visits, where parliamentarians and officials have met counterparts to discuss core policy issues, the role of committees, the legislative process, etc., some WFD programmes are potentially developing into longer term, more involved relationships.
13. The Parliament's work with the WFD is largely centred around the issue of strategic planning being led David McGill, Assistant Chief Executive, who has been working with the legislatures in Morocco, Jordan and Bahrain. This work has involved developing a new approach to drafting, agreeing, implementing and monitoring a strategic plan. This has been an extremely worthwhile project and has promoted the Scottish Parliament's expertise in this field.
14. Over the last 18 months, the Parliament has hosted a number of visits, from these legislatures (in addition to visits there) and it is hoped that new strategic plans will be produced as a result of this constructive work.

## **Long term programming and relations**

15. One of the positive outcomes from the WFD relationship has been the opportunity for the Parliament to develop longer term relationships with other legislatures. Through longer term funding commitments from the WFD, and with programme planning, the Parliament can better identify what assistance it might usefully provide, for what purpose and when. In addition, we have developed strong relationships which have helped facilitate good progress with this parliamentary strengthening work.
16. This is a fresh approach to the Parliament's international work and which has the potential to secure greater outcomes. It also puts the Parliament into close contact with other legislatures with which it might not have had any relationship previously.

17. Building on this work, consideration could now be given to developing bilateral relationships with other legislatures. This could or could not, be formalised through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. Some other legislatures do sign such Memoranda with other parliaments routinely. For this Parliament, it would be important to consider any such proposals carefully, on a case by case basis. There is strong interest in the practices and processes of the Scottish Parliament, the founding principles which underpin its approaches, and how it has continued to evolve since 1999 through the devolution of further powers, and holding the Scottish Government and public bodies to account in the exercise of these powers. Constitutional issues in Scotland over recent years have also heightened interest in what we do, how and why.
18. Indeed, constitutional developments over recent years have generated a great deal of interest in the work of the Parliament, creating opportunities for us to showcase areas of best practice and continued innovation in supporting its founding principles. Areas such as Strategic Planning, public engagement, and the role and function of SPICe have generated much interest amongst visiting delegations.
19. This interest in Scotland and the Scottish Parliament has led to informal discussions with other legislatures around the scope for bilateral relationships and the wider benefits which these could bring to the organisation. In line with the overarching aims and outcomes set out in the International Strategy, a key consideration for any bilateral work will be to identify how and what benefits such engagement can and would bring, and how it would enhance the reputation of the Parliament, and create opportunities to exchange skills and knowledge for the continuous professional development of Members and officials.
20. Bilateral relationships are issues which some visiting Speakers have already discussed informally with the Presiding Officer. **Before progressing to a more formal phase, the SPCB is invited to consider whether, in principle, it is content for officials to continue such discussions.**
21. Each firm proposal for a bilateral relationship would of course be brought to the SPCB for its full consideration and agreement.

### **Future reporting**

22. In the first activity report submitted to the SPCB in November 2017, it was highlighted that IRO would look for other opportunities to publicise the Parliament's international activity. Since then, improvements to the 'International Activity' webpage have been made through photos, more narrative around inward visits, and infographics. This is something which IRO is continuing to consider and identify what further improvements can be made.

### **Resource implications**

23. There are no resource implications arising from this paper. All visits in this period were accommodated from within the IRO budget or from other sources e.g. the CPA, BIPA, WFD.

### **Publication scheme**

24. This paper will be published in line with the SPCB's Publication Scheme.

### **Decision**

25. The SPCB is invited to:

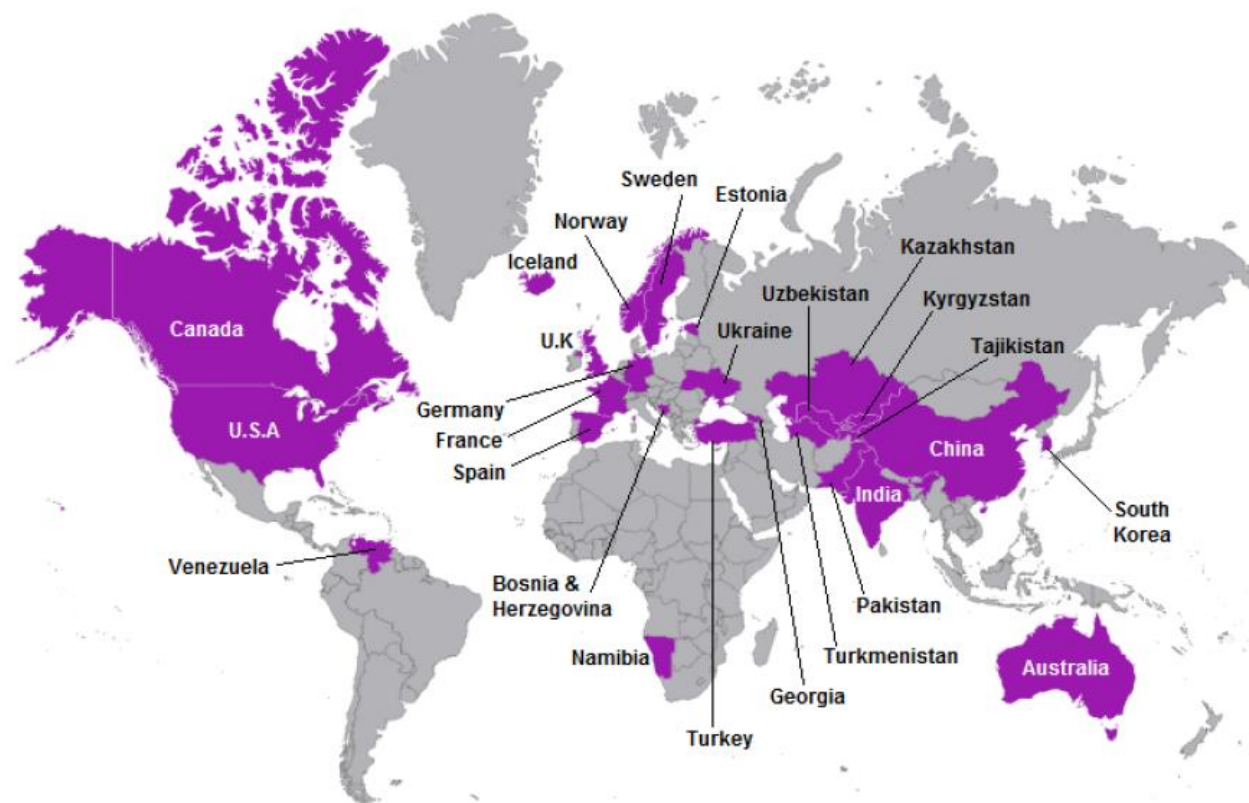
25.1 note the activity undertaken across the last six months of 2017;  
and

25.2 consider whether, in principle, it is content for officials to continue discussions around the scope to develop individual bilateral relationships.

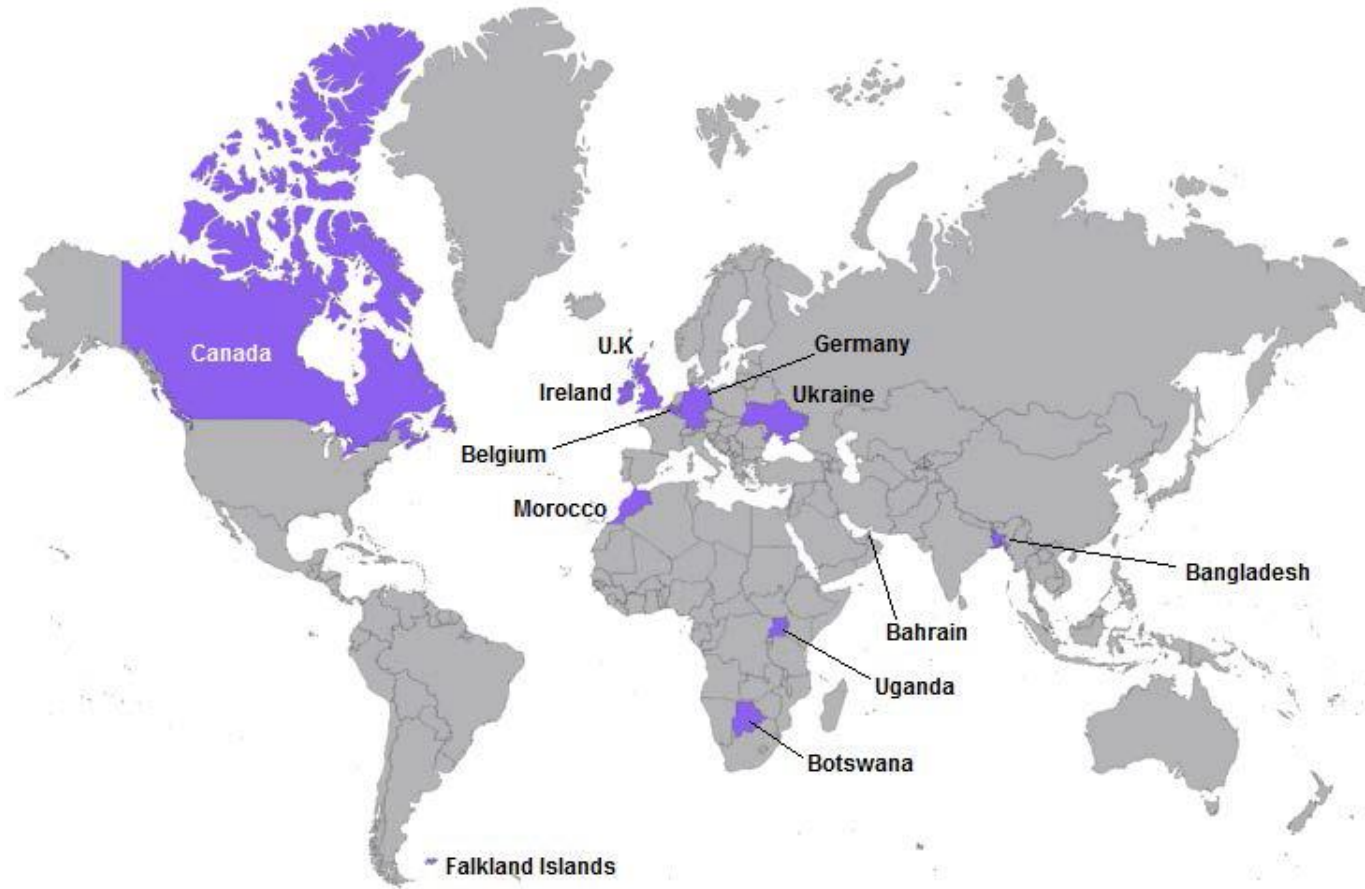
### **International Relations Office**

March 2018

## Inward visits to the Parliament 1 July-31 December 2017: Annex A



### Outward visits by the Parliament 1 July-31 December 2017



## Europe



Belgium  
(Outward)



Wales  
(Inward & Outward)



United Kingdom  
(Inward & Outward)



Sweden



Norway



Germany  
(Inward & Outward)



France



Spain



Iceland



Bosnia & Herzegovina



Republic of Ireland  
(Outward)



Estonia



Turkey



Ukraine  
(Inward & Outward)



Georgia

## Asia



China



India



Republic of Korea



Bangladesh  
(Outward)



Kazakhstan



Turkmenistan



Tajikistan



Uzbekistan



Kyrgyzstan



Bahrain  
(Outward)



Pakistan

## Africa



Botswana  
(Outward)



Uganda  
(Outward)



Morocco  
(Outward)



Namibia



## North and South America



USA



Canada  
(Inward & Outward)



Venezuela



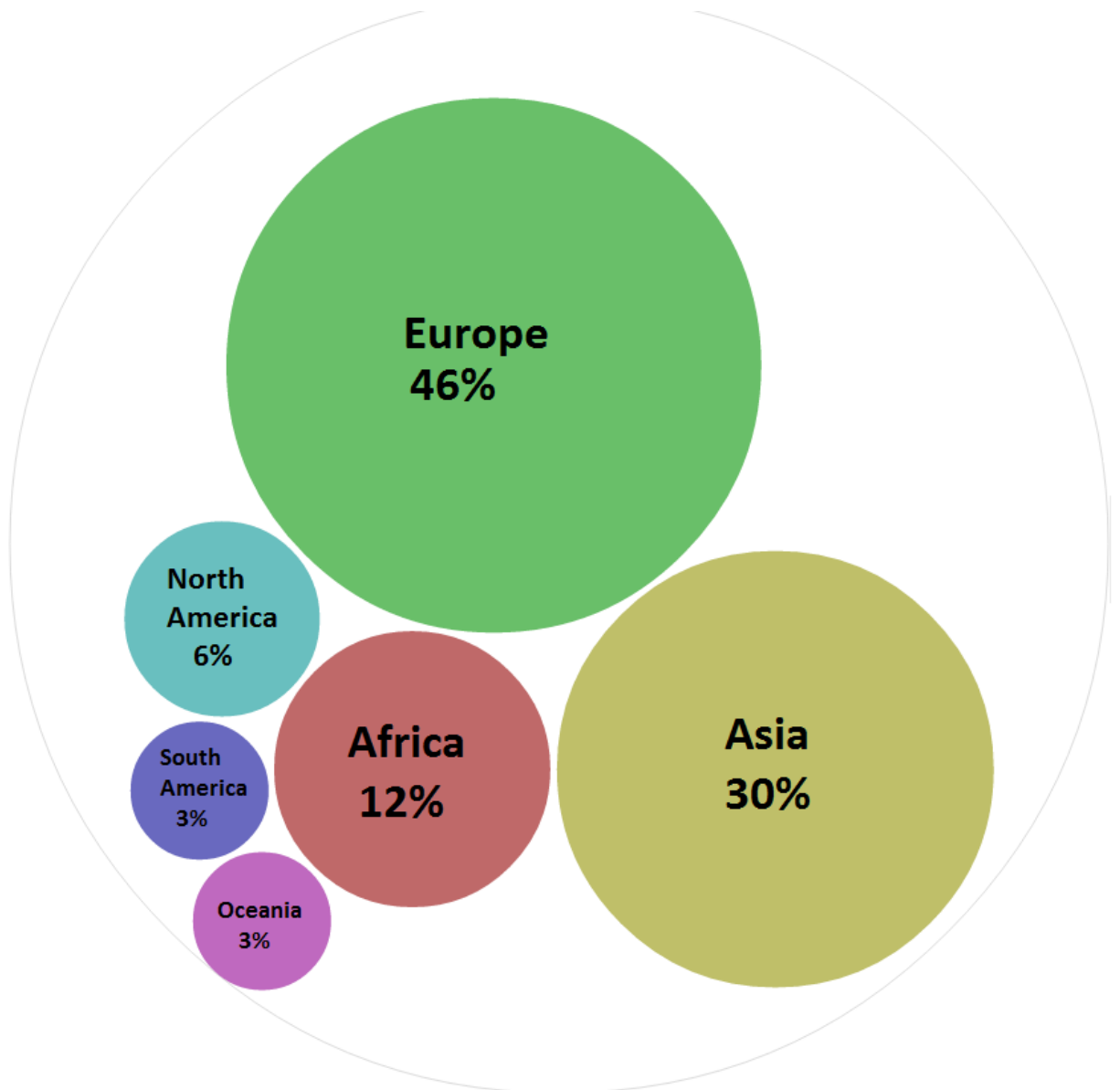
Falkland Islands  
(Outward)

## Australasia



Australia

**Percentage of inward visits: Annex B**



Breakdown of delegations by country: Annex C

