

Minutes: British Council APPG AGM

15 November 2021, 10:30-11:30

Attendees: John Baron MP, Flick Drummond MP, Mark Logan MP, Baroness Thornton, Virendra Sharma MP, Lord Watson, Catherine West MP, Karen Bradley MP, Ben Yates, Calum O'Byrne Mulligan, Scott McDonald (British Council), Kate Ewart-Biggs (British Council), David Thompson (British Council), Lizzie Parker (British Council)

Apologies: Sir Roger Gale MP, Stephen Timms MP, Baroness Smith, Baroness Hodgson, Stephen Kinnock MP, Sarah Champion MP, Lord Campbell

1. Welcome

- 1.1 APPG Chair John Baron welcomed attendees and outlined the purpose of the meeting
- 1.2 John Baron thanked Kate Ewart-Biggs on behalf of the APPG for her leadership of the British Council during the pandemic

2. Update from British Council Chief Executive, Scott McDonald

- 2.1 APPG Chair John Baron introduced Chief Executive of the British Council, Scott McDonald, to the Group
- 2.2 Scott McDonald outlined the role of the British Council overseas and his vision for the organisation
- 2.3 Scott McDonald offered his thanks to the APPG for their support over the past two years
- 2.4 Scott McDonald went on to provide an update on the British Council finances following the pandemic and the steps taken to address the financial situation, including the transformation programme
- 2.5 Scott McDonald gave an update on the British Council spending review settlement

3. Update from British Council Interim Chief Executive, Kate Ewart-Biggs on Afghanistan

- 3.1 Kate Ewart-Biggs outlined the current status and situation for former British Council staff and contractors working in Afghanistan, including the context around correspondence between former British Council contractors and APPG officers
- 3.2 Kate Ewart-Biggs updated the APPG on what the British Council is doing to support these colleagues both in the UK and those still on the ground in Afghanistan

4. AOB

Adjournment Debate

- 4.1 APPG Chair John Baron gave Members details of the Adjournment Debate he had secured on recent APPG report *The Opportunities for Global Britain*, taking place 18th November
- 4.2 John Baron offered to reshare the report and summary article with members of the Group

5. Q&A

- 5.1 John Baron asked Kate Ewart-Biggs for her understanding of the challenges in evacuating former staff and contractors from Afghanistan. Kate Ewart-Biggs gave details of the ARAP process and the situation on the ground for those seeking to leave the country.
- 5.2 Catherine West asked about British Council footprint in Eastern Europe, specifically in Belarus, and what the organisation's strategy is in the region.
- 5.3 Kate Ewart-Biggs responded that the British Council works with the Baltic states to improve resilience and cohesion in the region, as well as a significant operation within Poland, and will continue to prioritise this work.
- 5.4 Baroness Thornton thanked John Baron for his work chairing the APPG. She asked about the British Council's social enterprise/non-formal education work and programmes and whether these will continue.
- 5.5 Scott McDonald responded that these programmes were and have been extremely effective and valued, although some have been scaled back as part of a prioritisation exercise in the Foreign Secretary's review process.
- 5.6 Lord Watson echoed Baroness Thornton's thanks for the work of John Baron on behalf of the APPG. He asked whether or not the British Council senior leadership are meeting with FCDO Ministers to discuss the organisation's spending review settlement.
- 5.7 Scott McDonald responded that talks between the FCDO and the British Council are ongoing. John Baron added that he hoped to secure a meeting with FCDO Ministers on behalf of the Group.

6. Close

- 6.1 John Baron made the Group aware that the APPG inquiry on the value of international connections and experience for young people has concluded and the report has been published. He noted that there was a plan to explore the report in more depth in a session after Christmas.
- 6.2 John Baron made the group aware that the APPG AGM is planned to take place in February.
- 6.3 The meeting closed with John Baron thanking Members for attending. Scott McDonald also added his thanks to Mr Baron for his leadership of the Group.

ENDS