



Minutes of the Forum Meeting held on Wednesday 21 September 2016 in the Activity Room at the Unity Centre

The Forum meets Chris Matheson MP

This occasion will be the 2nd time the Forum has welcomed our local MP Chris Matheson to hear news and exchange ideas on international development issues. As pointed out in the CWDF Diary “much has happened since our MP talked to the Forum, way back in December 2015!”

Chris began by expressing a great interest in issues of global justice but admits to not always knowing a great deal – he feels he has a lot to learn from us. He appreciates that there are many areas of concern but he focussed on the following:

Climate Change:

- As regards Paris Agreement – very significant that both US and China have ratified it. UK should have done the same by the end of the year. It will be interesting to observe the follow up in Marrakech next year.
Chris expressed regret at the government’s decision to abolish the Department for Energy and Climate Change. He feels it is the wrong decision if the government is serious about climate change.
- Re global energy supply - Hinkley power station has had the go-ahead which is going to cost vast amounts and will be funded largely by the Chinese. Chris is not happy about the Chinese being involved in our energy supply. He commented on how strange it is that the British state can’t provide energy but the French and Chinese can sell it to us!
There are some really good initiatives on our local energy supply but unfortunately he is not allowed to invest in it. He would certainly advocate local solutions to energy supplies and continues to advocate solar and renewable energy. He commented that the government’s decision to allow objections to wind farms was a little worrying.
Re fracking – Chris has always been against fracking and suggests that UK does “the right thing” and influence other nations not to go down this route.

Aid:

- In the post referendum world, the political discourse has shifted and this government is rolling up different expenditure. Both the Foreign Office and the Ministry for Defence have influence on how the aid budget is used. The new Minister for International Development, Priti Patel, has very right wing views on aid spending. She is planning to tie aid to trade and business deals. This strikes Chris as a form of blackmail. Chris believes aid and development are the right things to do – an argument he uses to people who think money should be spent at home. He often has to justify (he said it is “lamentable” that he/we have to justify the development budget) why it is important to give aid and frequently has to defend the UK’s commitment to 0.7% aid budget.
- One of the issues of growing concern is the desire for cheap labour which robs developing countries of their businesses. Take the example of Bangladesh – it is a country which is developing well but businesses are now being moved to Sudan where labour is cheaper

Post Brexit and aid:

- British public clearly felt that something was wrong and blamed the EU but Chris sees it as a problem of global capitalisation
- Post – Brexit is utter chaos. There has been no preparation for the next stage. Now it is a question of how to get the best deal but the people doing the negotiating may

have very different priorities. He feels it is important to protect employment rights and environment laws and to defend basic issues in the negotiations. Chris sees overseas aid going back down to basics.

Syria and the refugee crisis:

- Chris actively supports the campaign to allow unaccompanied children into UK asap especially as hundreds of children have already “gone missing”. He is trying to find out what the council plans are. People in Chester are already offering to host families. There clearly has to be an ideological as well as military solution. He voted against extending the bombing of Syria because he considered there were too many factions involved and bombing would not help the situation.

Elections in US:

- As regards Donald Trump and his speeches – things have gone backwards and people now having to have basic arguments about humanity. Thinking had moved on but his campaign has encouraged racism.

The following are comments/observations/issues from members present:

Abdun Noor: concerned about responsible trade and the conditions for workers overseas. It is our responsibility to expose exploitation when we hear about it. What we consider child labour, some businesses overseas do not. In Bangladesh, for instance, a worker aged 14 years is not a “child”.

He is concerned about so much unfair trade practice

Heather Swainston: children have great understanding of justice. Refugee crisis is now seen as security issue rather than humanitarian. Justine Greening has left DfID – is it possible that she has taken some of what she learnt at DfID to her new department?

Husni Omari: Would like to see a more active policy on Syria. Jordan has taken in 1 million refugees (1 in 6 of the population) and can't cope. War has to stop

Chris thinks that to end the war we will have to make “shabby deal” with Assad

Brian Rowe: Obama has been talking about Palestine but been no change. What is UK government doing about the situation? Chris thinks there hasn't been any more progress since general election.

Terry Green: Government appears to support the Israeli state

Katie Rowe: Aid agencies do work better – money goes through partners. Also expressed concern about tax dodging - £360m lost in tax dodging

Peter Hobson: concerned about aid being linked increasingly to self interest

Jean Cornes: Suggested making it easier for young people from overseas to come to Britain to attend university and take their expertise back to their countries.

Bernard Payne: Post Brexit - need a coherent opposition to have a coherent plan to challenge the government.

Chris thinks there is clear opposition to many issues, not just on “Post-Brexit”. For instance, although not an international development issue, there is strong opposition to the proposed return of grammar schools. **But** in the media there is clearly biased reporting. 85% of newspapers are owned by 6 billionaires with no British status who do not always pay taxes but control our thinking and tell us how to vote. Chris feels this is a development issue because of the way they report on issues of a humanitarian nature.

Brian Rowe: Re TTIP he has read that the trade deal finished. Chris pessimistic about it.

Terry Green: CETA being debated next week.

Roger Turner: Expressed concerned that David Davies (Secretary of State for Exiting the EU) is quoted as saying that CETA is ideal trade model.

These comments reflect the very wide ranging interest in development issues of our member groups.

Terry expressed the Forum's sincere thanks to Chris for coming to talk to us.

Business Agenda

1 **Welcome:** Terry Green chaired the meeting

Present: Terry Green (Chair), Lindsay Cussons (Baha'i), Abdun Noor, Husni Omari and Elizabeth Bott (all CAMCC), Brian Holroyd (Christian Aid), Gerald Grant, Terry Walsh (CND), Mark Rideal (CND, FoE and Chester Friends of Palestine), Cheryl and Jonathan Puttock (CFoP), Brian and Katy Rowe (Christian Aid and CFoP), Roger and Cheron Turner (Chester Quakers), Wyn Holroyd, Heather Swainston (CDEC – Developing Global Learning), Andrew Needham (CPRE), Vicki Jenner, Pam Price, Kath Stephenson and granddaughter, Tony Walsh (Ellesmere Port CAFOD Group0, Ann McCarthy (CAFOD and Christian Aid), Bernard Payne (St Columba's Third World Group), Joan Patten, Peter Hobson (Amnesty International), Sue Bownas (CAFOD) and Jean Cornes

Apologies: Tom Ormiston, Linda Shuttleworth, Heather Lannin, Catherine Green, Margaret Lord, John Tacon, Gill Miller

2 **Minutes/ notes of Forum meetings, and matters arising:**

- Forum 12th July 2016 – no matters arising
- Committee 5th September 2016 – mostly discussion and arrangements of forthcoming meetings with Chris Matheson and Stephen Twigg and discussion of format for Forum meeting on 8th Nov

3 **Around the Table:**

- Updates from our members on current activities, events and issues – see under AOB
- Reference to CWDF Diary entries

4 **Arrangements for next Forum and Forum-supported meetings:**

- **Friday 7th October:** A specially arranged meeting to hear Stephen Twigg MP, Chair of the Commons Select Committee on International Development to give a talk on the wide-ranging work of this Committee. 7.00pm in Binks Building at the University of Chester. Arranged in association with the University's Department of Geography and International Development.
- **Tuesday 8th November:** CWDF bi-monthly meeting. We aim to use this as an opportunity to reflect on the various issues raised at the sessions on 21st September and 7th October and what these may mean for CWDF's future priorities. 6.45 for 7.00pm at The Unity Centre. Key issues – tax evasion and climate change
- **Thursday 17th November:** “**How Change Happens**” With Oxfam's Duncan Green, 7.30pm in Best Building, University of Chester, arranged by the Department of Geography and International Development.

5 **AOB:**

WH: Celebrating fact that 20mph speed limit been approved in residential areas. PP commented that the speed limit is not easy to implement

HS: Celebrated 19years of CDEC. Funding for development education has now gone but that there is an even greater need for this education now. Hope to get Martin Bell back next year

PH: 5th Dec, 7.00pm at home of Wendy and Alan Sieber, 28, Eaton Rd, Handbridge, - Amnesty International card signing.

- BR: Chester Friends of Palestine next meeting, 28th Sept – priorities to be discussed will be boycott , divestment and sanctions
- JP: showing of film on Bethlehem in early Dec – look out for date in CWDF diary
- KR: Christian Aid campaign called “Change the Story” - aims to show refugees in a more positive light.
8th – 16th Oct is week of action on climate change. We are asked to lobby our MP
- LC: Has fliers on showing of films for social change.
- JC: brought to our attention a charity shop called Share on corner of Hunter St
Helps more destitute members of our society
- Tony W: CAFOD quizzes for Ethiopia continue on 3rd Friday of month in Ellesmere Port
- BH: reminder about Songs of Praise on 25th Sept. Also trying to recruit more people to help in Christian Aid Week. At present collections going down each year. Hold successful collections in supermarkets. Always need more helpers
- HL: raising money for Sierra Leone. She has cycled across Britain. Anyone wishing to sponsor her?
- AM: CAFOD and Lampedusa Cross – crosses made from wreckage of boat carrying refugees which sank off island of Lampedusa. Crosses given to survivors as sign of hope. CAFOD commissioned crosses for each diocese in England and Wales and these have been taken round churches and schools to highlight the plight of refugees
- SB: Positive note about fair-trade gold - Argos now selling fair-trade wedding rings. SB asked about future of fair-trade in city and next year’s Fairtrade Fortnight. HS hoping to get producers to say how fair-trade has benefitted them and put their stories on banners round city. Trying to get “Joe Public” to understand the benefits of fair-trade. Look for photo opportunities.
Suggestion that perhaps Forum could focus on supermarkets.
Directory of Fairtrade in Chester has now been produced.
- TG: if anyone interested he has copy of work that Stephen Twigg’s Commons Select Committee on International Development being doing.