



Westminster Hall Debate

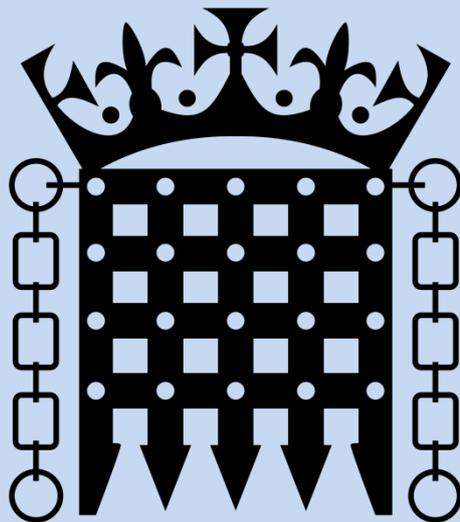
Scotland-Malawi Relationship

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Proposed by David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)

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David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)



I beg to move, that this House has considered the Scotland-Malawi relationship.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope, having spent the afternoon with you in the Procedure Committee.

I am pleased to have secured today's debate, and am very grateful to be able to give the House a chance to discuss and celebrate our very important and successful bilateral relationship. Before I speak about some of the more pressing matters, I would like to talk about the connection, the significance of which is seen through the numerous links to Malawi in every single one of the 59 constituencies in Scotland. I do not doubt that some of the other hon. Members present will be keen to use this debate to highlight some of those cultural links and will try to keep my comments brief to allow other Members to speak. I am happy to take appropriate interventions as well.

I pay tribute to the Scotland Malawi Partnership for all its work to promote the relationship between our nations. It has been invaluable in helping me to prepare for this debate. In particular, I thank and pay tribute to David Hope-Jones, its chief executive, who is tireless in his resolve to celebrate the scale, energy and impact of Scotland's bilateral relationship with Malawi.

I cannot speak on this subject without honouring another David—now would probably be a good time for someone to intervene with those immortal words, “Dr Livingstone, I presume?” The doctor is a famed figure across the globe, but nowhere more so than in his home nation of Scotland and in Malawi, where he travelled extensively on missionary work. David Livingstone's influence on Malawi is evident right across the country. Its commercial centre and oldest city, Blantyre, was named after his birthplace in Lanarkshire. The history of the great Scotsman's travels and crusades against slavery is taught to every schoolchild in Malawi even today, which ensures that he remains a much revered figure.

It should therefore come as no surprise that almost 200,000 Malawians are now involved in the Scotland Malawi Partnership, along with 100,000 Scots. The organisation's impact should not be underestimated: some 2 million Malawians benefit directly from the partnership and 4 million benefit indirectly. In Scotland, almost half the population know someone with a connection to Malawi—an absolutely remarkable statistic.

There are 1,131 Scottish organisations and community champions with active links to Malawi, such as the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Classrooms for Malawi, Mary's Meals, Oxfam Scotland and 500 Miles. Glasgow City Council also has strong links. Successive Lords Provost have made the link a real priority since 2005, with each visiting Malawi and outdoing the last in raising funds, engaging and inspiring more people in Scotland and Malawi to connect for their mutual benefit. I recently met our newly appointed Lord Provost, Councillor Eva Bolander. I take great pleasure in informing the House that she will continue the tradition and is ready for the challenge.

A number of Glasgow City Council's schools already have thriving relationships and partnerships with Malawi. These are active, dignified, two-way, school-to-school links that inform and inspire generations of young Scots to be good global citizens and that are transforming lives in Malawi and in Scotland.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)



I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Will he join me in recognising and commending the excellent work of a disproportionately large number of people in my constituency to support the people of Malawi? He has already mentioned the excellent work of Mary's Meals, but we also have the Mid Argyll Malawi Twinning Group, the Imani Development Foundation in Oban, the Netherlorn Churches' project "Seed for life. Feed for life", many secondary schools such as the Rothesay Academy, Dunoon Grammar School, and the primary schools of Strone, Dalmally and Iona.

David Linden

I wholeheartedly join my hon. Friend in commending those wonderful local organisations. We have seen the generous, welcoming spirit of Argyll and Bute in its international work in recent years. I am more than happy to put that on the record.

In my constituency, Carmyle Primary School, St Joachim's Catholic Primary School, Croftcroighn School, Swinton Primary School, Eastbank Academy and my own former high school, Bannerman High School, all participate in programmes to connect our distinct but intertwined communities over thousands of miles. On a recent visit back to Bannerman, I was delighted to learn that the school is preparing for a trip to Malawi next year, which I hope to be able to join.

Bannerman High School's preparations are likely to be a lot easier than those of Malawians who wish to travel to Scotland, however. That brings me to my first substantive issue: the extremely serious shortcomings in the UK Government's handling of visa applications. The Scotland Malawi Partnership has reported that over the past decade, its members have experienced an increasing number of issues with visa applications. Worryingly, many of them feel that the situation is worse now than it has ever been. Some argue that Malawians who apply for visas to visit the United Kingdom are treated with contempt from the outset, with ever increasing charges and an ever decreasing quality of service.

The partnership reports that what it sees as the dysfunctional processing of UK visas not only affects its work and the work of its members across Scottish civil society, but has a serious negative impact on the Government's own development and diplomatic efforts, causing reputational damage. It is quite clear that this is not an isolated issue. The partnership's experience is that Scottish churches, schools, non-governmental organisations, businesses, NHS boards, hospitals, universities and community groups have had to cancel visits, often at a considerable cost, because UK visas have not been processed correctly or in time.

When concerns have been raised in this place, the Government have been quick to point out that around 82% of UK visa applications from Malawi are successful—perhaps the Minister might ask the relevant Minister to break down for me how that percentage was arrived at. I understand that a significant proportion of Scotland Malawi Partnership members who start the process of applying for a UK visitor visa are not able to complete it because of systemic failures, so I would be keen to find out whether those incomplete applications are included within that percentage. I would also like to know if the figure includes visas that are awarded on the day of travel or even after the scheduled travel date.

The second substantive issue is the 1955 Malawi-UK double taxation treaty. I appreciate that Ministers may have been somewhat distracted by Brexit and disrupted by the snap general election, but the Government have not yet honoured their promise—and it was a promise—to update that treaty. The final deadline of July 2017 has now passed. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) recently asked a written question about the matter, but I am afraid the Treasury's answer was disappointingly noncommittal about the timeframe for completion. Its reason for delay—that the Government of Malawi had raised further points for consideration in August 2016—was somewhat at odds with the promise made by the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury last

December that: *“we hope to conclude soon”*.—[Official Report, 16 December 2016; Vol. 618, c. 1142.]

Nine months on, we seem to be no further forward. I do not think that I am overstepping the mark when I say that the UK Government appear to be dragging their heels. They ought to get on with their day job and bring this matter to resolution. I do not consider it unreasonable to ask them to let us know exactly when they aim to have the treaty signed off. Any update would be most welcome.

The Minister for Africa (Rory Stewart)

Would the hon. Gentleman like to reflect on whether this is an entirely one-sided problem, or whether there are any issues on the Malawian side of the double taxation treaty that may also be holding things up?

David Linden

The point is that we need to get on with getting this sorted. The Government have been quite clear about setting a timeframe, but I can see from my constituency caseload that they are perhaps too focused on other matters at the moment. I would like Ministers in the Treasury to honour their promise to get this sorted. As I said, I do not think it is unreasonable for the Government to let us know exactly when they aim to have the treaty signed off. Perhaps the Treasury can follow that up, although I appreciate that it is not the Minister’s Department.

My third concern is investment in Malawi. It is only fair to point out that the Scotland Malawi Partnership applauds the CDC-DFID impact accelerator programme, which enables smaller investments that are better suited to a country such as Malawi. I echo the partnership’s calls for the Government to build on that and urge the CDC to increase the investment going to Malawi.

I am conscious of time, as I know other hon. Members wish to speak. The final issue I will raise is DFID’s engagement with civic links between Scotland and Malawi. The Department’s small charities challenge fund aims to better engage smaller NGOs, but there are concerns about the design of the programme, such as the fear that payment in lieu will render the fund inaccessible for smaller organisations in Scotland. Will the Minister undertake to discuss that with his colleagues, so that this well intentioned fund can be tweaked to be of greater benefit to organisations that have the potential to do great work with its support?

Let me finish by looking positively towards the future of the bilateral relationship between our nations. The phenomenal work being done in Scotland and Malawi, which I hope other hon. Members will highlight, is certainly something to be celebrated. Our ties continue to be strengthened and further developed. Our 150-year relationship bridges the gap. Let each of us continue to build upon that. In the words of Dr Livingstone,

“I will go anywhere, provided it is forward.”

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con)



I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) on securing this debate.

Malawi obviously has a great effect over all of Scotland, and I will mention one or two of my colleagues who cannot be here today. Scottish organisations such as Scotland’s Rural College, part of which is in my constituency of Gordon, and the Co-operative College have developed innovative solutions for agriculture and trade—which, being a farmer myself, is something that is close to my heart—helping to increase sustainable daily production and helping farmers to get the best return from their crop. That has transformed Malawi into a regional hub for the development of cattle vaccines, which protects livelihoods and food security for hundreds of thousands of people.

The hon. Member for Glasgow East has mentioned a number of schools already; I will not go over them all again. However, Williamwood school in East Renfrewshire, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton), has sent more than a hundred pupils on visits to towns in Malawi and raised more than £25,000 for Classrooms of Malawi, leading to the construction of a local nursery and the completion of 14 classrooms at Ekwendeni Primary School.

In my own constituency of Gordon, Famine Relief for Orphans in Malawi has worked with communities in Malawi for more than a decade. Originally set up to provide food for feeding stations, it worked in response to the floods in Malawi in 2015 and 2017, and over time it has provided funds to build two health clinics, a health worker’s house and two school classrooms with composting toilets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) has also supported development opportunities in Malawi for some time now. She told me that she visited an excellent event in her constituency last Saturday, which highlighted the brilliant work of the Dalitso Project, an organisation based in

Arbroath, since 2007. It runs two day care centres and orphan residences. It now cares for 310 children and provides jobs for 30 staff.

I want to add my voice to that of the hon. Member for Glasgow East. I am aware of the difficulties for Malawian citizens of obtaining a visa for the UK. There have been many reports of the same system being dysfunctional. Furthermore, the 1955 UK-Malawi double taxation treaty dearly needs updating. Now is the time to use the strength of our relationship to overcome these hurdles.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)



It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) on securing it.

The links between Scotland and Malawi were well documented by the hon. Gentleman. They have their roots in history, but they are still flourishing now. I suppose that traditionally they existed through the links between the Church of Scotland and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, which remain strong to this day. Indeed, my own presbytery in Orkney is linked with the Thyolo Highlands Presbytery in Malawi. These are the sort of direct and meaningful links that exist.

Like other hon. Members, there are schools in my constituency that have direct links and partnerships with schools in Malawi. Westray Junior High School and Sanday Junior High School in particular have done a lot in recent years to offer their pupils an opportunity to see the life of their contemporaries in Malawi and to offer people in Malawi a chance to come in the other direction.

Those are very commendable links—the sort of links that should give us confidence that the civic links between Scotland and Malawi will continue to grow and endure, built as they are on links between communities and individuals within those communities. Indeed, at this point I should also pay tribute to the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which provided me with a briefing for this debate. I suspect that it has done for other hon. Members what it has done for me—namely, listing the links that exist within our communities.

In fact, there is another link that the Scotland Malawi Partnership was obviously not aware of, because it did not appear on its list. Nevertheless, it is an absolute exemplar of the sort of project that we should see and indeed do see across Scotland. It is the Malawi Music Fund, which is based in Orkney. It was set up by a constituent of mine, Glenys Hughes, who taught music in secondary schools in Malawi in 2006; she took a year out to go there. She came back and with her knowledge and experience she then built up links. The traffic between the two countries has continued to this day. Malawi Music Fund runs residential workshops and also raises funds for bursaries for secondary education, which, as hon. Members will know, is not free in Malawi.

Just this weekend, I met a dance teacher in Orkney, Joanna Davies, who had just been in Malawi with Orkney's Malawi Music Fund. She told me, with some excitement, of her plans to bring a dance teacher and dancer from Malawi to Orkney—a link that she had built during the visit. I listened with a curious mix of inspiration and despondency. I could not help being inspired by the enthusiasm of somebody who had gone out and made a connection with somebody she had identified, from her own professional experience, as very talented. I was despondent, however, that by encouraging her to go forward with a visit or programme for this young man, I was almost certainly creating my own casework, because from the profile she described, I just know that getting him a visa will be an absolute nightmare.

It need not be like that. As a constituency MP, I have seen a number of projects over the years in which visitors come from Malawi to the United Kingdom. I have lost count of the number of times I have sat at my desk, bashing the phones and trying to get some common sense out of UKVI, the UK Border Agency, Border Force or whatever it was called at the time. It is the same old story every time: "We don't believe that these people are going to go back, notwithstanding the basis on which they have been brought here."

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)



I apologise for coming late to the debate; pepani chomene, as we say in Chitumbuka. Is it not one of the greatest ironies of visas that the visitors who apply have so often been funded by Government institutions? These are UK Government and Scottish Government programmes that are vouched for by highly reliable organisations, but that does not seem to make a blind bit of difference to the Home Office.

Mr Carmichael

In calling it ironic, the hon. Gentleman is being kind to those responsible. Whether or not it is ironic, it sure as hell is frustrating and totally unnecessary. I have found myself speaking to Heathrow Border Force staff on a Saturday, with every document that could possibly be required, but it is always the same old story: any ambiguity in any of the information provided is always interpreted to the detriment, not the advantage, of the person seeking entry.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)



The right hon. Gentleman makes some very good points; I share his frustration in my own constituency cases. Does he agree that it fundamentally undermines the reciprocal nature of the relationship that we can go to Malawi relatively easily, but people from Malawi cannot come here? It is difficult to have a friendship of equals when we do not treat people from Malawi as equals in the immigration system.

Mr Carmichael

Indeed. It strikes at the very heart of the nature of the relationship, which ought to be a partnership. I was struck by the last thing Joanna Davies said on Saturday, after I outlined a fraction of what she would have to deal with before her friend's visit: "When we go there, we have absolutely none of these difficulties." That is the experience that many of us have had, and I hope the Minister will take on board the hon. Lady's good point. It is difficult and occasionally impossible to build the sort of links that I believe the Minister wants, if another part of the Government is operating in a way that undermines the efforts of such groups.

The Member for Glasgow East mentioned the 1955 UK-Malawi double taxation treaty. It is to be regretted, to say the least, that we are still speaking about this; I rather thought that we had got beyond that and that we had sufficient undertakings. If there are difficulties at the Malawi end, we need to hear more about them, but surely in a modern agreement the partners should be equal. The characterisation of the 1955 treaty is one of a colonial power to its colony. I hope that when the Minister talks about difficulties coming in each way, that is not an indication of the UK Government's attitude in the present day.

Rory Stewart

It is a little uncomfortable, but the question of the trade relationships is about technical legal definitions and trade. The problem is not an ideological problem; it is not a problem of colonial history or timetables. It is a problem of such things as very specific legal definitions of geography. These things cannot be resolved by simply standing up, trying to shame the British Government and telling us to get on with it. The Malawian Government have to make some moves in the negotiation. The negotiation cannot be resolved in the way the right hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr Carmichael

I was a legal practitioner before I came to this House, so I am well acquainted with the issues around interpretation and negotiation. All I would say is that if the Government are experiencing difficulties in revising a 62-year-old treaty with a former colony—now a partner in the Commonwealth—they may have a taste of what is ahead of them in other upcoming negotiations. The Minister may wish to educate some of his ministerial colleagues in that regard.

In conclusion, we often hold up Malawi as an example of some of the negatives: poverty, the debt burden and some of the social issues, such as the oppression of LGBT+ people within the country. That is an inevitable fact in how the issues are seen. I suggest that today's debate offers us an opportunity to hold up Malawi and our relationship with it in a rather more positive light. How Malawi has built its links with Scotland—the civic links, church links, school links and business links—could in many ways inform the opportunities open to other African countries. I spent two weeks with Voluntary Services Overseas in Cameroon a couple of years ago. The problems facing people in Cameroon are not dissimilar to those affecting people in Malawi, but there is not the same plethora of local groups and civic engagement across Cameroon. Malawi could bring some of its experience to

bear, perhaps through an organisation such as the Commonwealth, to show the opportunities for civic engagement and the results that could be produced when that is made to work properly.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab)



Thank you, Mr Chope, for the opportunity to speak in this important debate marking the relationship between Malawi and Scotland. I start by paying tribute to Dr Jack Thompson, one of the Scotland Malawi Partnership board members. He passed away last month. He played a huge role in bringing our two countries together, and he will be missed.

It is a real pleasure to be able to say a few words about the warm historical ties between our two countries and what we can do in the future. Scotland has long had a close relationship with southern Africa, with many Scots making that part of the world their home in days gone by. In recent times, many Africans have chosen to make Scotland their home. I welcome that diversity and I want to see more of it. I am hugely proud to be a Lanarkshire man and to represent my area in Parliament, but Lanarkshire men have been making their mark for generations. None other than David Livingstone left Scotland generations ago and formed a lasting bond between Malawi and Scotland.

Health and wellbeing matter to us all, particularly those of us on the Labour Benches. Today's debate on public sector pay showed that; the motion has just been accepted, which I welcome. Health and wellbeing are at the heart of our partnership and friendship. In Edinburgh just last month, Sarah Brown, the education campaigner and wife of the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, rightly paid tribute to the role Scotland has played in reducing the numbers of women dying during childbirth and during pregnancy. There has also been good work on HIV and support for older people. In education, the links between our young people grow and grow—year after year, some 94,000 people throughout Scotland have active links with Malawi.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP)



The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about health and wellbeing, and I know of his constituency association with Dr David Livingstone. Will he acknowledge, with me, that the association continues to this day—not least through the University of St Andrews and its connection with the College of Medicine in Malawi? The university is doing some fantastic work and is continuing the good work of David Livingstone.

Hugh Gaffney

I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I certainly recommend such work, as I recommend anyone on a visit to Blantyre to see the tribute we pay to David Livingstone.

Forty-six per cent. of Scots know someone who has been to Malawi, supported someone living and learning in Malawi, or donated to charities supporting good work in Malawi. I pay tribute to all those Scots who have played a part and I ask more to do so.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)



The hon. Gentleman mentioned education. Rosshall Academy and St Marnock's Primary School in my constituency are partnered with schools in Malawi. Does he agree with me that two-way communication ensures that generations of young Scots become good global citizens?

Hugh Gaffney

I certainly pay that tribute to education, and I will come on to it, as many schools in my area are involved.

I will say a word about the Scotland Malawi Partnership, which exists to co-ordinate, support and represent the huge number of civic links that Scotland has with Malawi. It is a small charity working independently, but it is changing lives. Organisations from across Scotland include half of Scotland's local authorities, every Scottish university and most of the colleges, as well as more than 100 primary and secondary schools, hundreds of faith groups, hospitals, businesses, charities, NGOs and, more widely, several grassroots community-based organisations.

Mr Paul J. Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op)



My hon. Friend makes great mention of the level and depth of support in Scotland for Malawi, in particular for its development. Will he take particular note of the Mary's Meals charity, which supports 320,000 children by ensuring that they have at least one nutritious meal a day as part of their education? That is a vital component of ensuring a resilient education system in Malawi.

Hugh Gaffney

I certainly welcome Mary's Meals. My hon. Friend is right in what he was saying. It is a charity from Scotland, and the work we do in Scotland through such groups is absolutely fantastic for our nation. I urge as many people as possible to join the Scotland Malawi Partnership and attend the 2017 annual general meeting on Saturday 30 September.

I pay tribute to my Labour colleague, the noble Lord Jack McConnell, who inspired the signing of the Scotland Malawi Partnership and to the Scottish Government for their work in this area. Labour has a proud record of international work, support and investment. We did so much to help the poorest in our world, to support small businesses, to encourage and defend the rights of women and girls and, importantly, to deliver on the values of never walking by on the other side.

The days of Lady Penelope and Parker are over; this is about equality, solidarity and decency. My constituency has a proud and active number of residents building strong links with Malawi. We talked earlier about education, and in my constituency we have schools such as Coatbridge High School, St Mary's Primary School and St Michael's Primary School twinning with schools in Malawi, allowing our young people to share ideas, experiences and ambitions. That is at the foundation of building a better world for us all, no matter where we stay.

It is worth noting that Scotland and Malawi have been drawn in the same group for my favourite sport, netball, at the Commonwealth games next April. I am hopeful that our long-standing friendship will withstand the result of the game, which I am quite sure will be a Scottish victory.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) on securing it.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)



I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr Chope, because I appreciate that I came late to the Chamber. I was detained in a Select Committee, so my apologies—pepani chomene. I am grateful for the opportunity to offer a few brief reflections on Scotland’s relationship with Malawi, and congratulate—yewo chomene; zikomo kwambiri—my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) on securing this debate.

I was fortunate enough to secure an Adjournment debate on St Andrew’s Day 2015 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Scotland-Malawi relationship. In the nearly two years since, the relationship has continued to get stronger. The Scotland Malawi Partnership continues to publish evidence of its impact and outreach in both Scotland and Malawi.

One of the most formative experiences of my life was spending a year working in the north of the country, teaching in St Peter’s secondary school in the wonderful city of Mzuzu. I made many tremendous friends, who have stayed with me for life, and had a huge number of valuable experiences interacting with the young people and seeing how daily life pans out for people in some of the most difficult circumstances in the world.

I echo the points made about the value of the relationship in both directions. We in Scotland and the United Kingdom have just as much opportunity to learn from our friends, colleagues and communities in Malawi as they have to learn from our different experiences here in the UK.

There has been a lot of mention of constituency links. In my own constituency, a number of different projects and schools have connections and partnerships. I would particularly highlight the University of Glasgow's Wellcome Centre for Molecular Parasitology, which is running the Blantyre-Blantyre project. It is funded by the Scottish Government and a number of other funders to study life expectancy and different health interventions in Blantyre, Malawi and Blantyre, Scotland, and to share the learning experiences and the lessons from both those communities.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)



The hon. Gentleman highlights some of the projects in his constituency, including education projects. South Morningside, Bruntsfield and Gilmerton primaries in my constituency have direct links with primary schools in Malawi. Will he reflect on the fact that that might be why this partnership has grown, flourished and endured for so long—that younger people are involved and they take that through the rest of their lives?

Patrick Grady

That is absolutely correct. It is more than 10 years ago now that I spent time living there, although I do not know that I would have counted as a young person even when I was there. In my 2015 debate, I said that it would be a fascinating job of work to fund research that tracks the experiences. I say that to the Minister again today. Many of the partnerships and school visits took place when the children were quite young, in secondary school. They will now be well into their careers. We should track the impact that that has had, as well as the impact on their counterparts in Malawi, so that we can start to quantify and see how we can continue to build on it.

Mr Sweeney

Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Patrick Grady

I am conscious of the time.

We need to make sure that there is support for the institutions of Government. I would reiterate the points made about visas, so that we can show that we are genuinely welcoming. People who are sponsored and supported by organisations in Scotland, very often with Government money, are able to come here, take part in those visits and feel the benefits, and the communities they visit are able to feel the benefits.

Likewise, there is a need to get the tax treaty correct. The way that we will ultimately help Malawi and countries across sub-Saharan Africa and the developing world is when they are able to mobilise their own resources and invest in their own infrastructure. That means they have to have tax treaties and financial institutions and structures fit for the 21st century.

I am grateful for your indulgence, Mr Chope. I congratulate all the speakers and look forward to the Minister's reply. Zikomo kwambiri.

Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair)

I am going to call the Minister no later than 20 past five. I hope the two Opposition spokespeople will be able to share the time between now and then, should they so wish.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)



It is good to see you in your position, Mr Chope, and it is a pleasure to be back in Westminster Hall. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) on securing this important debate.

We have heard today that the links between Scotland and Malawi go back more than 150 years. They are built on a sense of dignified partnership and civil engagement. It is a relationship of mutual understanding and respect. The friendship between Scots and Malawians began, as we have heard, in the late 1850s, with a warm welcome extended to abolitionist and missionary David Livingstone and his companions when they entered what is now Malawi for the first time. The Scotland-Malawi relationship is arguably one of the world's strongest north-south people-to-people links. It is defined by respect for a two-way partnership, rather than simply a one-way charity. As we have heard, almost 100,000 Scots are actively involved in links with Malawi, and almost double that number of Malawians are actively involved in links with Scotland. In fact, almost half of all Scots personally now know someone involved in a link with Malawi. That is an incredible achievement, is it not?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East said, the partnership succeeds in mobilising energy from across all sections of Scottish civil society, with hundreds of Scottish schools, churches, community groups, universities, businesses and hospitals actively involved.

Alison Thewliss

My hon. Friend mentioned the links that schools have made. Is he aware of the Glasgow-Malawi Leaders of Learning programme that Maureen McKenna, the director of education in Glasgow, has piloted? It has taken 35 staff from Glasgow since 2012 over to Malawi and fostered really great links between Malawi and Glasgow.

Chris Law

I am aware of it. It is just one of many examples of the partnership between Scotland and Malawi and how it continues to grow. I certainly will touch on a couple more examples.

To give one example in my constituency, Dundee University medical school is partnered with the University of Malawi's College of Medicine and Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe, providing outstanding opportunities for final-year Dundee medical students through placements at partner institutions in Malawi. Those placements are used to help to develop medical and educational infrastructure in Malawi by supporting staffing and staff development.

A further example is the twinning project between Westgate health centre in Dundee and Matawale clinic in Zomba. They maintain two-way communication between Dundee and Malawi via internet access at the clinic. They also provide locally sourced equipment for the clinic, and local Dundee artists display their paintings for sale in the waiting room, with 25% of the purchase price then donated to the project.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)



We have heard a lot in this debate about the constituency and school links. In my constituency, St. Margaret's High School has set up an orphanage. It has improved attendance and attainment at its partner school, Chisitu. New Monkland Primary School, Clarkston Primary School and St Dominic's nursery are also all doing great work. Does my hon. Friend agree that the work done on fostering those links from an early age is so important for both countries and needs to continue?

Chris Law

I absolutely agree. It is also about understanding people from different parts of the world, and the exchange, the cultural relationship and the building of bonds.

I would like to turn my attention to the 1955 UK-Malawi double taxation treaty. I echo the comments and concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East and other colleagues in the room who urged the Government to update that treaty. It is without doubt a completely unfair and outdated treaty. It is so outdated, in fact, that it cannot cover not only digital and IT services but televisions, which go back to before my date of birth. We know that both Governments have committed to updating the treaty. However, in the last Parliament UK Ministers repeatedly stated that it would be imminently finalised, and a final deadline of July 2017 was stated and once again missed. I do not know about your thoughts on this, Mr Chope, but to me, "imminently" means immediately. Here we are, with something so simple still to resolve. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments shortly.

I would also like to draw the Minister's attention to the issue of UK visas, which we have heard about today. Malawians regularly report that getting a visa for the UK is almost impossible because

they are faced with endless bureaucracy, failing systems and non-existent customer service, and they can only ever speak with private businesses contracted to work for the UK Government. The failures of that system, week in, week out, have the potential to undermine not only the 150-year-old Scotland-Malawi friendship but the UK Government's own development, diplomatic and trade interests in Africa. I therefore urge the Minister today to support a full public review of the UK Government's visa-issuing processes for those invited to the UK as part of our credible, long-standing civic links.

On a lighter note—I will finish on this—I believe that this debate has captured and celebrated the scale, energy and impact of the bilateral relationship between Scotland and Malawi. The relationship is stronger and more engaging today than ever before and represents the best of Scottish internationalism. For the reasons I have stated, Scotland can rightly be proud of the distinctive and effective approach it has taken over the last 150 years to international development, and I am sure that all in the Chamber would agree that they wish this partnership to not only endure but strengthen for many years to come.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab)



It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), who has summed up the issues succinctly. It is my pleasure also to speak for the Opposition in this debate. I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for securing this important debate.

The relationship between Scotland and Malawi, as most contributors have said, is rooted deep in history, going back more than 150 years to the work of Dr David Livingstone. In addition to the historical nature of the relationship, the Scottish Government justified their decision to focus effort on Malawi on the basis of developmental need. Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries and

ranked 170th out of 176 countries in the human development index, which includes such factors as income, education and health achievements.

Today it was my pleasure to speak to Lord Jack McConnell of Glenscorrodale, who, as the then First Minister of Scotland, signed off the Scottish international development programme. He emphasised to me the cross-party nature of the agreement. That has been reflected in today's debate and in the excellent contributions made by all the speakers. I particularly note the comments of the hon. Member for Gordon (Colin Clark), who talked about the various exchange projects in his community, including help with schools in Malawi and also giving aid to famine victims.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) talked about the opportunities for Scottish schoolchildren to see the lives of children in Malawi, which we would all agree is an education in itself and an opportunity that not all schoolchildren get. He also talked about the Malawi Music Fund. Many speakers touched on the issues of obtaining visas for Malawian visitors who wish to participate in exchange visits to this country. I am interested to hear what the Minister says about visas.

Mr Sweeney

My hon. Friend makes the point about how the relationship is not simply to do with development, but about how the value added by Malawian citizens making their home in Scotland is a great thing too. I particularly think of the African Challenge Scotland partnership in my constituency, which promotes citizenship and activity with the African community in Glasgow. Is that not a demonstration of the opportunities that better visa relationships with Malawi would offer and a greater cross-pollination of activity and cultural sharing between our two countries?

Liz McInnes

I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I agree that it is difficult to think of anything negative that comes out of such relationships. They educate our children and make them more aware of their role as international citizens. Today I was at a meeting about the Send My Friend to School project, which serves a similar purpose. It teaches schoolchildren about the world outside the UK and makes them think about the plight of young children growing up in developing countries. Children getting such an education gives us all hope for the future.

The double taxation treaty of 1955 was also mentioned and remains an issue. Despite the Minister's interventions, I think we would like a response to the concerns raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) talked about health and wellbeing and about improvements in HIV treatment and in maternal mortality. He also talked about the Commonwealth games. Perhaps netball is one area where Scotland will not offer assistance to Malawi, but we look forward to the game with interest.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) brought his own valuable personal experience of working in Malawi to the debate. There is no substitute for visiting a country and finding out exactly what makes it tick. Spending time there and working there is an education in itself.

On the issue of aid, it is important that the impact of aid spending is correctly and appropriately assessed. I want to ask the Minister about the 2016 Springfield Centre report, which highlights issues with Scottish Government aid to Malawi. It questions the sustainability of some of the actions taken and how their impact is measured, with actions taken not necessarily being reflected in their impact. I would be interested to hear the Minister's comments on that.

I also emphasise the role played by the British Council in Malawi, which works closely with the Scotland Malawi Partnership, particularly in schools. The British Council in Malawi is working with schools under the Scotland Malawi Partnership. The head of youth and schools at the Scotland Malawi Partnership will be visiting Malawi later this month, where she will discuss how the Scotland Malawi Partnership and the British Council can support each other and work together over the coming year.

The British Council has a strong programme, "Connecting Classrooms", which focuses on skills development and capacity building of teachers across the country. The British Council has for many years been sharing information on those Malawi schools participating in "Connecting Classrooms" to facilitate links. Of the 180 school links over the last six years, 70% are between Malawi and Scotland. The British Council is working with the Scotland Malawi Partnership and Education Scotland to increase that further, using the Professional Partnership's visit in February next year as a platform to do that.

Ian Murray

My hon. Friend, as always, is making a wonderful speech from the Front Bench. I think it would be appropriate to pay tribute to David Hope-Jones, the chief executive of the Scotland Malawi Partnership. He has not yet been mentioned in this debate, but he does so much, not only to enhance the partnership but to provide us all with the information we require in this kind of debate.

Liz McInnes

I thank my hon. Friend for putting the name of David Hope-Jones on the record, and I apologise for my omission.

The British Council Scotland has worked closely with colleagues in Malawi on the Future News Worldwide programme—a journalism and media-training project, conceived in 2014. Recently, two young Malawian journalists were selected out of almost 2,000 applicants to attend the annual Future News Worldwide conference, held in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh in July of this year. There, they received exclusive training from some of the world's leading media organisations, including Reuters, CNN, Facebook, the BBC and Google News Lab, and connected with 100 young journalists from across the globe.

The Scottish Government launched a new international development strategy last autumn, focusing on a small number of key countries: Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia and Pakistan. The Scotland Malawi Partnership helps to ensure that Malawi has a continued high profile in Scotland, particularly in schools and among youth organisations. According to the University of Edinburgh, more than 94,000 Scots are actively involved in links with Malawi each year. Separate research suggests that an estimated 46% of Scots now personally know someone with a connection to Malawi—whether a parent with a church link, a child involved in a school partnership, or a friend active in linked communities.

It could be argued that this relationship is mutually beneficial. More than 300,000 Scots benefit from it, not least through the 160 school-to-school links, which are now an integral part of the educational experience for young Scots. I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on that issue, which has been a running theme throughout the speeches and interventions in this debate.

The Minister for Africa (Rory Stewart)



It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for introducing this debate, but above all I pay tribute to the Scotland Malawi Partnership—genuinely one of the most unique, remarkable, interesting and human interweavings of two nations anywhere in the world.

Right hon. and hon. Members have spoken powerfully about those links. The hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) spoke about the links between the University of St Andrews, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Aberdeen in maternal healthcare, obstetrics and specialist tropical diseases. The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) spoke about responses in childbirth.

That is all part of a pattern of a dense interweaving of different types of interaction. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) spoke about interactions in music. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark) spoke about the relationships that exist in exchanges. The hon. Members for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) and Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) spoke about school partnerships and connections. Everything that has been said, including by the hon. Member for Glasgow East about Mary's Meals and by the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) about the personal experience of his extraordinary year spent teaching in Malawi, shows the genius of the Scotland Malawi Partnership. Those are just a dozen out of 1,300 different examples of Scottish individuals, small Scottish charities and Scottish institutions linking to Malawi.

There are three things from which we can learn. The first is, to use a horrible jargon phrase, the civic multiplier—the way in which the Scotland Malawi Partnership, with a relatively modest amount of money, can draw on all the institutions to create a much richer partnership and be more than the sum of its parts. The second element, which has come through time and again in today's speeches, is mutual respect. Everyone who spoke talked a great deal about equality and about how we can learn as much from Malawi as it can learn from us. Finally, there is the genius of co-ordination and connections. Since 2005 the work of the Scotland Malawi Partnership has been not to create the connections, but to find them and mine them—to draw them out of the soil and reveal to us that thick web of connections between two nations, essentially putting Malawians on the board. That is a very important part of the work of the Scotland Malawi Partnership.

Along with the Scotland Malawi Partnership and, indeed, the good work done by the Scottish Government in Malawi, the Department for International Development is also a major player there. In financial terms it is a considerably larger player, as we spend probably 12 times more a year. We are doing something slightly different. We pay a huge tribute to the Scotland Malawi Partnership, but we recognise that there is space for other things.

We work on a systems level. We have been working since the 1960s, and during that time we have spent well over £1 billion on trying to transform the country's fundamental governmental systems. That means addressing health systems, not merely through the ways that we have been discussing, such as university exchanges, but by getting into the details of how drugs are bought, procured and moved into clinics, and of how to deal with HR mechanisms of health clinics. It means thinking about enrolments in education. Almost every boy and girl in Malawi now goes to primary school, but the question is how we move on and think about quality. As for agriculture, Malawi is heavily dependent on maize, which is a challenge. There are not always markets for maize and the Malawian Government are currently reluctant to allow people to export it. There is a question not only about transforming the markets for it, but about how to diversify into other crops.

There are therefore two different relationships: the very rich one between the constituencies of those right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken, the Scottish people and Malawi; and the bigger relationship with the British Government. What can we learn from each other? Perhaps I may modestly and bravely suggest things for the Scotland Malawi Partnership to consider. It has been an incredibly successful partnership, but two or three things occur to me. The first is whether the wonderful friendship, partnership and diplomatic relations that have been developed could occasionally be used to challenge the Malawian Government about uncomfortable issues, such as corruption. Can the relationships be used to talk about that—or about family planning? The

Malawian Government have brought the fertility rate in Malawi down from 5.7, but the average family size is still 4.5 children. That is a major challenge for a country that is already densely populated. Is the Scotland Malawi Partnership prepared to speak about that?

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) raised some recent surveys about the Scottish Government's work in Malawi. Indeed, we in DFID could reflect on some of those questions about innovation and sustainability, and how the human, personal connections, which are often really good, can be sustained into the future. How can we achieve structural transformation and get beyond supporting 300 people in a particular place today to changing the Malawian Government system, so that they could do that themselves?

Two areas of learning that have emerged for the Department: the questions of the double taxation treaty and of visas. My interventions have probably revealed my views on the double taxation treaty, but I think we can do more on visas. Progress has been made. We have now identified a designated UK Border Force officer, who will focus on Malawi visas to try to facilitate the Scotland Malawi Partnership. That may save the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland from having to spend every Saturday talking to the UK Border Agency. However, there is more that can be done.

More broadly, the big lesson from the Scotland Malawi Partnership may be for the Department for International Development itself. The Scotland Malawi Partnership shows us a great deal. It shows us the powerful example of a man such as David Hope-Jones and what leadership can mean. In a pretty remarkable achievement, this man has succeeded in ensuring that 15 Members of Parliament appear to have read in detail the 1955 double taxation treaty, the 1978 amendment to it and all 16 of its articles. I am delighted that they show such authority and detailed knowledge. That shows David Hope-Jones's extraordinary success in communicating with Parliament.

More seriously, at the centre of the Scotland Malawi Partnership is its use of the idea of history and identity—something that perhaps the United Kingdom could be more confident in doing. We have heard a great deal about David Livingstone, but this relationship is not one that could necessarily have been taken for granted. Like all relationships, it was nurtured and developed. There was no inevitability about the relationship being between Scotland and Malawi. The hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) could have made a powerful argument that the natural relationship might be between Dundee and Calcutta. There are many profound relationships between Scotland and many different parts of the world. Malawi was chosen for good reasons, and over time, through talking about it, that relationship has become more powerful, more interesting and more human. There is a great deal we can learn from that.

There is also a precedent point: as the world changes, as African economies grow and as China and India come in, the amount of British money going into Africa will form a smaller proportion of those economies. Learning that we cannot necessarily do everything, and that we may want to take a leaf out of the book of the Scotland Malawi Partnership and learn how to operate at a smaller, more human scale in certain designated countries, may be important for the British Government.

Mr Carmichael

I sense that the Minister has said as much as he is going to say about the double taxation treaty. Given that we have not met the deadline that his ministerial colleagues previously identified, what new deadline have the Government set for themselves? Does he not understand that this taxation treaty is more important to Malawi than it is to Britain?

Rory Stewart

I am afraid I do not have time to address that point, but as a lawyer the right hon. Gentleman should be aware that setting arbitrary deadlines is completely irrelevant in that type of negotiation, and his intervention was extremely inappropriate given the time. We can talk about that in much more detail later, and we can discuss the 16 articles if we wish. Deadlines are not the key; the key is the Malawian political position on the treaty. Setting an arbitrary deadline is not likely to help us.

If we could move away from the right hon. Gentleman's confrontational tone and towards what I had hoped he would address, namely a more positive discussion on how we can learn from the Scotland Malawi Partnership, I would like in the remaining 45 seconds to touch on what those lessons could be. The first is about learning how to operate at a smaller scale. The second is about learning how to use history and identity. The third is about learning how to use civic connections, and fourthly and most important lesson is about learning how to place the human at the centre.

What is so striking about the Scotland Malawi Partnership is that it has found ways of engaging a whole human population. Britain could do that in Malawi or in Tanzania, Uganda or Nigeria. It is a very exciting way of thinking about how to do development in the 21st century. The fact that so many right hon. and hon. Members are here championing international development shows how these human connections give us the legitimacy and centre to make progress. I wish they would also champion international development in the main Chamber and champion the UK aid budget in the same way. I will end by saying zikomo kwambiri—thank you very much.

David Linden

I thank the Minister for his remarks. We have discussed the double taxation treaty and the issue of the deadline—I should clarify that the deadline was set by the UK Government. I am grateful to hon. Members for turning out in such numbers for the debate. It has highlighted that there is a real appetite to foster and develop this relationship on a cross-party basis in Scotland. I hope that all hon. Members present will join me and come together to form an all-party parliamentary group over the coming weeks and months. I thank hon. Members for their indulgence.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, hat this House has considered the Scotland-Malawi relationship.

Sitting adjourned.