

Chester World Development Forum

Minutes of the Forum Meeting

Tuesday 12th January 2016 at The Unity Centre



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

Present: Terry Green (Chair), John Tacon (minutes in Ann McCarthy's absence), Lindsay Cussons (Baha'i), Peter Byrne (CAFOD), Bernard Payne (St. Columba's), Gerald Grant, Kath Stephenson (Hoole URC), Vicki Jenner, Brian & Katy Rowe (Chester Friends of Palestine), Terry Walsh (CND), Tony Walsh & Tom Ormiston (Ellesmere Port Justice and Peace Group), Stuart Shuttleworth, Jim Holmes.

Apologies: Margaret Lord, Ann McCarthy, Gill Miller, Linda Shuttleworth. John noted that Heather Lannin would be arriving later after finishing work at 8:30pm.

Terry welcomed new member Jim Holmes, who had been introduced to CWDF by Gill Miller.

Terry introduced our speaker Becky Reeve, who spent 10 weeks in Togo, West Africa in 2015 as part of DfID's 'International Citizen Service' programme. Notes on Becky's excellent talk are at the end of these minutes.

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

- Forum meeting 10th November: the Forum minutes, and notes from Brian & Katy Rowe's excellent talk, prepared at very short notice, on their recent visit to Palestine and Israel, have been circulated.
- The Committee meetings on 7th December and 4th January: these had focussed on arrangements for forthcoming meetings, particularly Rob Elsworth's talk on the UN conference on climate change ('COP21') held in Paris in December 2015. Rob's talk will be at 7pm on Tuesday 2nd February in the Best Building, University of Chester.

Terry suggested that, in future, after Forum minutes are circulated, anybody wishing to comment on them should do so within 2 weeks. This was agreed to be a good idea.

Bernard drew the Forum's attention to an analysis of the outcomes of COP21 published in *The Independent* on Saturday 9th January. This highlighted significant shortcomings in the proposals, and downplayed the much lauded "success" of the Paris talks. We hope that Rob Elsworth will review these criticisms in his forthcoming talk, in order to give a deeper insight into what has been agreed at COP21, and to highlight what still needs to be done to minimise and mitigate future climate change.

Terry noted the closure of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign's account by the Co-operative Bank. The Committee had considered responding to this as our own account is also with the Co-op. Brian Rowe speculated that the new owners of the Co-operative Group – a hedge fund – have adopted a different 'risk profile'. This has made them unwilling to be involved in financial transactions between PSC and organisations in Palestine, even though these organisations are perfectly legitimate. John noted regretfully that any bank is entitled to withdraw banking facilities from any customer without having to give a reason. Terry pointed out that CWDF needs a bank account allowing easy access to facilities for paying in subscription monies – cash and cheques.

Terry reminded the Forum of the recent talk by Stephen Maund on the activities of the charity Ripple Africa in Malawi. Stephen has developed a proposal for grass roots projects which he would like to explain to CWDF. He will do this at the next Committee meeting, and wants to have our thoughts and comments to help him develop the idea further.

We have sent notes from our special meeting with Chris Matheson held on 21st December to Chris so he can check their accuracy. Once the notes are agreed, we will circulate

copies to Forum members. Chris has a good relationship with Stephen Twigg, who is chair of the committee which oversees the activities of DfID. He hopes to persuade Stephen to come to a joint CWDF/University meeting. As soon as we have details, we will publicise this event.

3. Financial update:

At the end of 2015, John reported that the balance in our account was £389.53 according to the bank statement dated 31 December. This did not include an unpaid cheque for £30 written to CHAWREC for room hire on 21st December, or cash in hand (£8.82) and minor expenses (£3.00). If all these are included in the calculation, our effective balance at 31/12/15 becomes £365.35. Since then, £96 received as subscriptions and donations has been paid in to our account (12/1/16), and further monies have been received and will be paid in shortly. Terry noted that our financial position looked healthy, although the £117 train fare for Rob Elsworth's trip to Chester will have a considerable impact.

4. Round the Table:

Kath Stephenson drew members' attention to a forthcoming programme on BBC2 at 9pm on Friday 22nd January, investigating the 18,000 companies registered in the Cayman Islands, a British overseas territory which has a very advantageous tax regime. These companies hold at least one trillion pounds of assets in banks.

Terry Walsh highlighted CND's big anti-Trident event in London on Saturday 27th February. A special coach will be running from Liverpool, calling at Chester station at 7:20am.

Bernard Payne appealed for any items to go out in the next mailing. These should be sent to Bernard as soon as possible.

New member Jim Holmes offered to talk about his experiences of 30 years' working overseas as a photographer specialising in social development.

Katy and Brian Rowe reported that that Chester Friends of Palestine had recently hosted four teachers from Palestine. They had spoken of their experiences of everyday life under Israeli occupation at a public meeting in Saltney.

John Tacon said that the Fairtrade Steering Group was hoping to bring a Palestinian olive grower to Chester during Fairtrade Fortnight, but details need to be confirmed.

Lindsay Cussons advised members that Sunday 17th January is World Religion Day, and there will be a special service in the City Road Church from 2 to 4pm.

Tony Walsh reported that the regular Friday quiz evenings have resumed at Our Lady's Parish Centre in Ellesmere Port, raising funds for CAFOD.

Tom Ormiston reported that their church had sent cards as expressions of support to Palestinian Christian churches.

Katy Rowe reminded members about the Christian Aid "big Coffee Morning" at Hoole URC on Saturday 27th February. (She will be running a book stall so will welcome a manageable number of additions!)

Heather Lannin arrived as the meeting was breaking up. She referred to the December lecture at the University, "Hunger and Malnutrition in an Affluent Society", suggesting that the CWDF website could include a link to the video on that lecture.

For further details of the events outlined above, please see the latest version of our Diary available on our website: <http://www.chesterwdf.org.uk/>

5. Arrangements for future Forum meetings:

- **Tuesday 2nd February** at 7pm in the University of Chester Best Building. Rob Elsworth, Climate and Policy Analyst at CAFOD, will give a talk entitled: "The Paris Agreement: A new beginning (for old battles)". He will review the progress made at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris and subsequent analyses published by experts in the field. All Forum members should publicise this event in order to help ensure a good turn-out.
- At the next regular Forum meeting on **Tuesday 8th March**, Heather Swainston will talk about Fairtrade. The date is within Fairtrade Fortnight, which this year runs from 29th

February to 13th March. On behalf of the Cheshire West and Chester Fairtrade Steering Group, Heather is also arranging a series of 'Fairtrade Fun Days' during Fairtrade Fortnight in schools across the borough. The climax of Fairtrade Fortnight will be two 'Fairtrade Fun Day' events in the Grosvenor Park on **Saturday 12th and Sunday 13th March**. We hope CWDF members will support these events by volunteering to help, and by bringing their families along. Chester MP Chris Matheson has promised to lend his support.

6. AOB:

The next Committee meeting will be on Monday 1st February.

Report of an illustrated talk to CWDF on 12 January 2016: Becky Reeve on her volunteer work in Togo

Becky Reeve lives in Chester and completed her A levels in summer 2015. She takes up studies at Lancaster University in September 2016 and has been using this 'gap year' to widen her experience, particularly by making overseas visits. Her presentation to CWDF was about her volunteer spell in Togo (June-August 2015) as part of DfID's International Citizen Service. This coming summer she hopes to go to the USA to work in camps for young people.

- The ICS programme funded by DFID gives young people of 18-25 the opportunity of taking up 10-12 week volunteer placements in a range of developing countries. Programmes are managed by different charities, in the case of Togo it is the YMCA. The British volunteers are expected to raise money towards the programme costs – Becky raised £800. The volunteers are housed with local families and go one-to-one with local volunteers. One aim is to ensure that the work and initiatives they get involved in can be sustained after they leave.
- Togo is a small country East of Ghana. The capital, Lomé, is on the Atlantic (more precisely on the Slave Coast). Togo was a French colony until independence in 1960. French is still the official language, a mixed blessing, as the volunteers discovered. The YMCA runs two programmes, one in Lomé, the other in the town of Atakpamé (160km to the north) where Becky was based.
- Becky and co-volunteers met at the Atakpamé YMCA Base to plan their programmes. Some of the activities took place nearby, street games for youngsters for example. The local volunteers taught their games and the British theirs. The young children look a bit baffled in one of Becky's pictures. But this was just the start of running and other means of physical development. It is thought that children are carried for too long, though women sometimes have to do it.
- The next activity was to help in the Orphanage, a creation of the town itself, principally by one woman (still running it). The volunteers helped with sewing activities and manual work preparing vegetable plots. This was a practical way to help feed the Orphanage.
- The next visit to the Prison was a shock. Three wings – young offenders, women, and men - had been built for 70, but now housed 300. Becky did not fear the men's section; they were just pleased to see visitors, and the visitors were horrified by the place. Many of the prisoners had



not had a trial and no means to get justice. In one corner there was a small group trying to learn French, the only language in which one can argue law. Becky said that the language problem keeps many people down, not just prisoners. She was not impressed by the government and the lack of access to higher education; only the better off stood a chance.

- The Hospital building is very basic. The work needed was a mixture of cleaning and hygiene awareness-raising. There are no actual doctors. Becky and her group went to town with cleaning. The floors and all surfaces were shining when they left. This is where the local volunteers come in, trying to keep standards up. As for health in general the volunteers worked hard, sometimes in typically African outdoor sessions. They tried to explain the importance of hygiene. They tried to explain that malaria is caused by flying insects and that the answer is to protect oneself at night with mosquito nets. Many people swore by useless traditional cures. What sort of government does not have an anti-malaria programme?



- In all these activities the volunteers were immersed in the local culture and traditions and developed great respect for everyone's resourcefulness and cheerfulness – despite some very poor conditions. These things put our own lifestyles in perspective, when we can too easily take things for granted.
- In addition to the daily programmes, the volunteers were given the “\$1000 Challenge”. During the course of their stay they were asked to suggest the most beneficial way of spending the sum of \$1000. Having thought long and hard about the possibilities, and having seen the poor state of facilities at the prison, they decided the money would best be spent on replacing broken milling machinery in the prison.
- Finally, and again in addition to the daily programmes, the volunteers were asked to plan and run a “Big Event”. They settled on a Sports Day-style theme with a good range of events, keenly competitive and otherwise, which worked out really well.
- Becky's slides gave us good range of images of the people they met and the places where they worked. Photography inside the prison was banned, but her description of conditions inside, particularly the overcrowding in the men's prison, suggested that the Prison Governor was right to be concerned about the risk of photographs being used in and claims of human rights abuses.
- After the presentation Becky fielded a wide range of questions, among which:
Main religions in Togo? Christian, Muslim, and Voodoo.
System of government? A recognised democracy but big military influence.
What did she miss most about Togo? The people, especially her lovely host family, and the smiling children.
- Terry Green, CWDF Chair, gave our thanks to Becky for coming to our Forum meeting and giving us an excellent presentation – from which it was clear that the volunteers had gained a great deal from this ICS programme. We wished her well for her future ventures.

Here is the link to the PDF version of Becky's PowerPoint: [Togo presentation 12-1-16](#)