



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01406

Name of petitioner

Ronald Hunter

Petition title

Suspension of overseas aid and donations until the economy fully recovers

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to immediately suspend foreign aid until the economy recovers and poverty, unemployment and hardship in Scotland is eliminated to much lower levels.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

I have written to both the current Prime Minister and his predecessor; the Deputy Prime Minister and his predecessor; the current International Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell MP and his predecessor (Douglas Alexander), inviting them to visit Levenmouth, one of the 4 unemployment blackspot's in Fife. **This area was selected merely as an example of many similar locations throughout the country.** Unfortunately, none of these accepted the invitation nor had the courtesy to respond, but the drivers of this petition will be readily demonstrated and evidenced.

The same invitation was extended to the current Culture Secretary, Fiona Hislop and to Ms Tricia Marwick, whilst she was my MSP, but again I did not receive the courtesy of a response. I did however receive a response from the former Presiding Officer, Mr Alex Ferguson, and at least that gentleman had the courtesy to respond, even although he politely declined. I have not raised it with the re-elected Scottish Government as they spend £9 Million per annum on foreign aid. The presiding officer, Ms Marwick has returned my mail unopened as she has guessed the content of my evidence.

I offer an open invitation to any serious politician of any level, concerned about the welfare of their constituents, or to those who would criticise this petition to tour the example area and thus present them with an opportunity to re-consider their position. For those critics who would argue against this position, I would simply challenge them to face the unemployed, the poor, the victims of crime, parents of children whose schools have closed or are closing, students whose courses are cut, and all of us who have increased health risks by the closure of hospital wards, through lack of funding, as mere examples from a whole range of challenges, and explain their views. Should they win full support from a non-staged managed audience, I will put my hands up and say that I got it wrong-but I truly believe that I have not, and am prepared to put this to the test, something, as has been proven, the supporters of foreign aid are unwilling to accept.

My previous petition on the same subject was rejected but since then the economy has been in a downward spiral, with re-capitalisation of the banks, a recession, a structured

and non-structured budget deficit, which cannot be sustained and thus cost reductions are necessary. The economy is now in a much poorer state and this should support re-visiting the cost of foreign aid, in light of the current situation and lack of public support for this expenditure.

Petition background information

Please allow me to begin by stating that this petition is not driven by racial prejudice but by common and economic sense, responsibility to the country, and the key factors that there are many pressing needs both within Scotland and the United Kingdom, that require both investment and operational funding to correct, and to de-risk the decline in the country. It also reflects, what I believe is the majority view of the public perception of this expenditure.

If any member of the Petition Committee has watched the programme, *The Secret Millionaire*, you need read no further, because each week the deprivation within the country is there for all to see. The expenditure being addressed is as follows (but it is not presented as a definitive list) are - £12.4 Billion in UK Government Aid (increased by £5.7 Billion Pounds or 77% in a period of austerity cuts) plus £260 Million (Libyan conflict to date) plus £4 Billion per annum on the Afghanistan war plus the £9 Million top up from the Scottish Government, set against an £84 Billion Pound Sterling budget deficit. If these funds were redirected it would certainly make a positive difference, to Scotland and the wider UK.

The millennium goals of all countries is to spend 0.7% of GDP on foreign aid, whilst admirable, has been overtaken by the so called “credit crunch”, recession and banking crisis which put every man, woman and child in debt to the tune of £7,000 each by recapitalising the banks, whilst other commercial companies, including PLC’s were allowed to fail, thus equality was inconsistent at best. I understand that there are only two countries currently meeting that level of expenditure, Sweden and the UK. Those countries whose budget surplus’s (China; Germany and Japan pre-Tsunami, for example) could afford this level of contribution, but have not and are unlikely to meet the 0.7% target, preferring to look after their fellow countryman first and foremost. The UK now has a structured and non-structured budget deficit, that all political parties agree, cannot be supported at the pre-austerity cut position, thus foreign aid becomes a worthy wish and aspiration, rather than a need.

An example for improvement is an unemployed individual under 25, receives annual unemployment benefit equating to around £2,400 per annum and if over 25 years of age (why the differential has to be asked as it is not logical) the annual unemployment benefit equates to around £3,000 per annum.

The roots of this petition are wide and varied, and have risen from the increasing unemployment, poverty, deprivation, school closures, etc. etc. and I merely pose a simple question—

“Can someone explain to me the rationale of taking my money and spending it on overseas aid, whilst the very problems that are being corrected on foreign shores, exist and are increasing in Scotland?” To date I have been unable to source any answer, even if I disagreed with any response that could have been received, at least I would understand the thought process behind this.

I have been advised that there is a budget for this expenditure, and we all know that budgets can be set many months before the fiscal year begins, and may be overtaken by events, worldly or otherwise. Budgets may be overtaken and replaced by immediate short term or medium term forecasts, which can be much more accurate, when making a financial decision.

The UK Government has increased foreign aid by some £5.4 Billion or 77% from £7B to £12.4 Billion Pounds in a period of austerity cuts, topped up by a further £9 Million from the Scottish Government. My perception is that Scotland has not directly benefited economically by these investments, neither have the unemployed or those who live in

poverty, position been enhanced and enriched by foreign aid.

Let us now turn to where my money goes to on overseas aid, and I have restricted this to a small selection of examples and therefore the list is not presented as, nor is claimed to be, a full list of the recipients:-

- Malawi - a country who is the recipient of the largest portion of aid from The Scottish Government and who has just expelled the British High Commissioner but still takes £9 Million. The UK government has recently cut aid to this country owing to poor human rights and the purchase of an extravagant private jet for the president.
- Afghanistan - no words can cover what is seen daily on the news reports, or with all due respect to the 374 fallen, the scenes at RAF Lyne ham and Wootton Bassett, nor can this be measured in financial terms.
- Recipient of £800 Million Per Annum is India which is currently spending £1.1 billion on a space programme, whilst vast poverty exists in that country, plus India donates £800 Million itself in foreign aid and also funds a nuclear programme.
- Whilst aid to China ceased during 2010, all I ask is why I paid aid to a country who loaned the USA trillions of Dollars to support them through the subprime financial crisis.
- It is announced by MI5 that the UK faces terrorist threats from Somali and Yemen and yet we provide aid to countries that take that stance against us? Pakistan receives an increase in aid (£60 million), whilst at the same time 25,000 jobs were lost by Woolworth's woes, and Pakistan harbours the Taliban who attack our troops in Afghanistan.
- Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Sudan and other African nations, where aid workers will openly tell you that countries now have a culture of "living on aid", similar to the UK culture of living on benefits. Thus they are not encouraged to better themselves.

Ask yourself-why is the £12.4+ billion is not supplied in British\Scottish made goods which will re-cycle the money and provide employment to Scotland\UK, Instead the money is donated in cash and it is recognised that a portion is subject to theft and misappropriation.

Ask yourself-why should I pay for "phantom aid" – that is money expended to change the policy of a country receiving aid rather than actual goods and services to that country. Is that the genuine purpose of aid?

Please look at article 25 of the UN 1948 Human Rights where it is an individual's right to have employment, an adequate home and standard of living-something that is not achieved in this country, at present. Whilst these have been updated over the years it is the right of each Scot to have this, but currently this is denied to a section of the community.

Now let us visit where the "home grown money" could be spent (some are dedicated local issues and others national issues) and again this is not presented as an exhaustive and complete list, nor is it listed in any priority:-

- The former constituency MSP states that each job loss (referring to Bi-Fab operating out of the Fife Energy Park) is a tragedy for the individual and their families. Kind words do not feed families and pay bills or mortgages, Lay off have occurred in October 2010 and I have personal knowledge of former employees, who have been unable to source replacement employment.
- On 21 May 2010 it was announced that some 10,000 Scottish children had moved (and are living) into poverty versus the prior year, bringing the total to 250,000- that cannot possibly be correct. The source is the Registrar General statistics on Child Poverty.
- On 30 April 2010 it was reported that 3 out of every 10 children in Scotland (30%) are in poverty prior to starting schools.
- It is estimated that the number of illegal entrants to the UK totalled 700,000 despite all the foreign aid, proving how ineffective this is.

- On 18 March 2010 grants for affordable housing have been cut from £525 Million to £351.9 Million.
- On 1 March 2010 it was announced that delays were being incurred in MOD housing whilst our troops were fighting.
- During March 2010 the respected broadcaster BBC aired a programme which identified corruption and mis-use of foreign aid.
- On 29 January a reduction in funding for Scottish Charities dealing with homeless Scots in London, was announced.
- On 26 January it was reported 100,000 Scottish children live in severe poverty (Source Save the Children).
- The lads fighting in Afghanistan should have adequate funds and not have to wait for 9 years + for the correct number and quality of vehicles and helicopters to reduce the risk to them.
- Ask the homeless or those on council house waiting lists if these funds should be used to increase social housing or whether they are comfortable with their situation whilst we build homes in foreign lands.
- Whilst out shopping in any local high street ask those present if they are content with the tumbleweed blowing down the streets, the empty shops, the job losses or would they prefer funding to regenerate the area's and not be a country training youngsters to be shelf stackers or call centre operators.
- Ask any school headmaster if they have all they need or is there a shortage of teachers and material.
- Ask any hospital if they have all they need or is there a shortage of doctors and support staff.
- Ask any Chief Constable if they have all they need or is there a shortage of officers and support staff.
- Ask any Fire Chief, who currently has insufficient numbers, if they have all they need or is there a shortage of officers and support staff.
- Councils were once "social companies" and are now rapidly moving to be "commercial companies". Left behind are reduced home helps, grocery collection services, social services, education, etc.
- Ask any immigration officers, who currently have insufficient numbers, if they have all they need or is there a shortage of officers and support staff. Is the public happy that there will be delays and greater risk from illegal aliens, which may include terrorists?
- Need to remove unemployment blackspots and provide employment and youth and adult training.
- £12.4+ Billion could avert marriage breakdowns, mental health issues, lost hope, depression, increased alcohol and drug misuse and poverty by providing genuine Scottish opportunities and unemployment.
- School closures could cease.
- A free nutritious school meal could be provided to each school child, alleviating a little discomfort for some Scottish children.
- Invest in hospitals to provide the best available care rather than the best care from the available funds.
- Provide funding for adult training or adult apprenticeship and reduce unemployment.
- Provide adequate education to youngsters about the dangers of drugs, alcohol, solvent misuse, sex education.
- Fund youth clubs to encourage youngsters in social skills and interaction, giving them an opportunity to be of the streets.
- Stop the redundancies in the armed forces-this would include warrant officers,

serving in Afghanistan, not receiving E-mails advising that they are to be made redundant.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01406>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

NO

How many signatures have you collected so far?

15

Closing date for collecting signatures online

N/A

Comments to stimulate online discussion