Foysol Choudhury MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian Region



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The ongoing situation in the Middle East is dire. Myself and Scottish Labour will continue to call for an immediate ceasefire. I continue to believe strongly in the cause of peace in the region through a two-state solution that delivers security, peace and freedom for all through a sovereign state of Israel and a sovereign state of Palestine, with an end to occupation and the siege.
I joined Riasoth and Robiun Miah Foundation and Scot Bangla Sporting Club Scotland to raise funds for essential humanitarian aid efforts in Gaza.

POST OFFICE HORIZON SCANDAL



I expressed concerns in the Scottish Parliament about the catastrophic miscarriage of justice that is the Post Office Horizon scandal.
I asked the Scottish Government how it's supporting victims and what discussions it's having with the Crown Office.
However, the Scottish Government dodged my question on whether they expect to be liable for compensation costs, instead referring to the UK Government compensation scheme. I urged for continued communication between the Scottish Government and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) for a Scotland-specific response, as COPFS holds sole responsibility for Scottish prosecutions. I also pressed for clarity on the Scottish Government's liability for compensation costs, pointing out the importance of addressing victims' needs in Scotland.
Additionally, I questioned whether the Scottish Government has engaged with the UK Government on Fujitsu's responsibility, emphasising the lack of financial repercussions for Fujitsu despite over 150 Government contracts awarded since the scandal. I pledge to persist in advocating for justice on behalf of affected constituents.

BANGLADESH VISIT



I had the honour of leading a delegation to Bangladesh along with my colleagues from the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Bangladesh, Miles Briggs MSP and Evelyn Tweed MSP. We visited Bangladesh to strengthen relationships between Bangladesh and Scotland, especially on issues of joint importance such as climate change, support for refugees and fair pay and conditions for garment workers, and to build skill and knowledge sharing opportunities which will benefit both our nations.

Collaboration was clearly a key emerging theme from this visit. Many of today's problems are global, or interconnected in some way, and by joining together to share our skills, experiences and positions we can hopefully produce innovative solutions to these problems. Isolationism will provide nothing. We have so much to gain from collaboration, and so much to lose if we ignore efforts to work collaboratively. As a CPG, we are collaborating across party divides to ensure we can provide responses and hopefully solutions to important issues. On a bigger scale, it's important now more than ever that nations begin to do the same.



THIRD SECTOR ROUND TABLE

I hosted a roundtable at the Scottish Parliament for third-sector community organisations to discuss the current funding model, barriers to access for smaller organisations, and what lessons could be learnt. The roundtable attendees and MSPs heard from Citadel Youth Centre, Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council (ELREC), EVOC, North Edinburgh Arts and The Larder.

The third sector in Scotland is a vital contributor to both the economy and society as a whole. The recent Scottish Budget announcements have left many organisations in the third sector unable to be sure of secure funding for the year ahead, directly impacting on their ability to provide vital services to communities when they need it the most post-pandemic and during the cost-of-living crisis. It was made clear from the roundtable's discussion that sustained, long-term and fair funding is needed for the sector. Some third sector organisations may be smaller, but they have a big impact and they must be consulted with and represented in the Scottish budget. This is especially true where they cater to minority communities and exclusion from the budget may increase inequalities for those communities.

I will continue to build on this constructive conversation and represent small third-sector community organisations in the Scottish Parliament, pressing for more funding and consultation wherever possible.



POLICY

Over the last few months, I have raised a number of important issues in Parliament. I spoke a number of times on the importance of support for refugees in Scotland. I highlighted the hostile environment created for asylum seekers by UK Government Asylum Policy. I also recently spoke in the Scottish Government Debate: From A Warm Scots Welcome to a Warm Scots Future for Ukrainians in Scotland and in a debate on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee's inquiry on asylum seekers in Scotland.

I addressed how we can seek to continually strengthen devolution in a debate on how devolution has changed post-EU and also spoke on the importance of restoring nature to tackle climate change.

I recently attended an event to mark the publication of the Scottish Government's response to the recommendations from the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Project. I also visited Kelvingrove Art Gallery to view their new exhibit which tells the story of Empire and how it still affects communities. I will be questioning the Scottish Government on what action it has taken to ensure that pupils can interact with museums as part of their education to help address racism and the legacy of colonialism.



CASEWORK



The UK's COVID-19 Inquiry is currently hearing evidence which suggests that the needs of certain groups in Scotland, including people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and the elderly, were overlooked by Holyrood Ministers.

Several constituents continue to contact me as they, or their children, are suffering with long-COVID. It is believed that there are approximately 187,000 people in Scotland who may be living with the condition. Often long-COVID can be misdiagnosed, so the real figures could potentially be higher. Even though those suffering with long-COVID have serious cardio-respiratory and neurological symptoms, many people cannot access the treatment and medical investigations that they need and are often left to advocate for themselves. As well as difficulties accessing care and advice, those suffering long-COVID may have difficulties being a carer, studying, working and may have financial problems and/or psychological problems.

I have written to NHS Lothian, asked questions at the Scottish Parliament, and spoke during the long-COVID debate last year, to highlight the difficulties that several of my constituents are facing. I will continue to raise this important issue at the Scottish Parliament to ensure that my constituents receive the care they need and so that more attention is given to this condition.

HEALTH INEQUALITIES



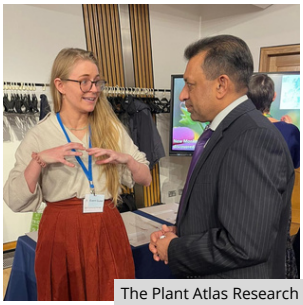
In 2019, it was reported that the life expectancy of a boy born in Muirhouse was 13 years less than a boy born in neighbouring Cramond. Analysis from The Health Foundation also reported that average life expectancy in Scotland reduced by 4.4 years since 2013. Read the full article here. I hope that 2024 is the year for us to turn around Scotland's record on health and life expectancy disparities.

LATEST ACTIVITIES



Thriving Communities Event


Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums Event


The Plant Atlas Research


The University of Edinburgh Widening Participation work



Healthier Choices, Healthier Communities campaign


Global Business Conference

CPG ON IMPROVING SCOTLAND'S HEALTH

Glad to convene a meeting of the Cross-Party Group on Improving Scotland's Health in the Scottish Parliament.

We discussed the alarming trends in disparity in life expectancy between Scotland's richest & poorest communities.

Action is needed on health-harming products



CONTACT ME

If you need help or advice with any issue or concern, get in touch and book your slot at one of my surgeries.

0131 348 6761
M1.14 The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh| EH99 1SP
Foysol.Choudhury.MSP@parliament.scot
@FoysolChoudhuryMSP
@FoysolChoudhury
@foysol.choudhury

CHECK OUT MY WEBSITE

www.foysolchoudhury.co.uk

