

Darren Millar MS - Visit to Brussels

December 2023

Purpose of Visit

I was invited to attend and contribute to a series of events in Brussels in December 2023.

The visit provided an opportunity to network with parliamentarians from other nations, discuss parliamentary practices and share best practice on faith engagement in politics.

Meeting with Palestinian Delegation

On 5th December I met with a delegation from Palestine, including His Excellency Abdairrahim Alfarra, the Head of the Palestinian Mission to the EU, Belgium and Luxembourg; Amria Hanania, the General Manager of the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine; Reverend Professor Mitri Raheb, founder and President of Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem, and Reverend Dr Jack Sara, the President of Bethlehem Bible College.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the ongoing conflict in Gaza and the wider impact on the Christian community across Israel, Palestine and the Middle East.

Networking Event

In the afternoon of the 5th December I attended a networking event at Club des Officiers du Régiment des Guides Asbl where I met with political and faith leaders and had wide ranging discussions on current affairs. This included comparing the action being taken in different jurisdictions by parliamentarians and NGOs in response to the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza and the wider challenges posed by inflation and the toxicity of political discourse.

Event at Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique

An event was held on the evening of the 6th December at the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. It was attended by around 300 delegates and provided an opportunity to meet with Sharren Haskel MK, a Member of the Knesset, to discuss recent increases in antisemitism following the Hamas attacks on the 7th October and action being taken to tackle racism and hatred towards vulnerable communities affected by the conflict in Gaza since.

I was able to inform Ms Haskel of the excellent engagement in Wales between the Senedd and faith communities and the ongoing cross-party work in the Welsh Parliament to tackle racism and promote good relationships and reconciliation between the Muslim and Jewish communities.

Meeting with Ukrainian Delegation

While at the Bibliothèque Royale I also met a Ukrainian delegation. This provided me with an opportunity to express the continued support of the people of Wales and the Senedd for the people of Ukraine.

The delegation spoke of its appreciation for the support of the Welsh Parliament and both the Welsh and UK Governments and the need for further practical support in the face of the Russian invasion. I have since reported these needs to colleagues in the Senedd and Welsh Government.

European Prayer Breakfast

The European Prayer Breakfast was held in the European Parliament on the morning of the 6th December. It was hosted by Catharina Rinzema MEP and Lukas Mandl MEP.

The keynote speech was given by Eduard Heger, the former Prime Minister of Slovakia, and also featured the families of Hamas hostages from Israel.

Given my links to Israel and Palestine, I was asked to participate in the programme by introducing Reverend Dr Jack Sara and Sharren Haskel MK and inviting them to offer their personal reflections on the impact of the 7th October attacks and ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, before leading a time of prayer for all those affected.

The event also included contributions from other international guests.

Lunch and Evening Networking Events

A lunch followed by an evening networking event was also organised for delegates. These afforded further opportunities for me to meet with international parliamentarians and others on:

- the role of faith in bringing peace and reconciliation between nations
- faith in the public square
- faith community engagement with elected representatives and governments

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