



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Backbench Business Committee

Representations: Backbench Debates

Tuesday 22 November 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 22 November 2016.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Ian Mearns (Chair); Bob Blackman; Kevin Foster; Gavin Newlands; Mr David Nuttall; Jess Phillips.

Questions 1-12

Witnesses

[I](#): Jeremy Lefroy.

[II](#): Kate Green and Seema Malhotra.

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Jeremy Lefroy made representations.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to the Backbench Business Committee. We have two applications this afternoon for debates in Backbench time. The first is from Mr Jeremy Lefroy. Your application is on the UK ivory trade.

Jeremy Lefroy: Thank you very much, Mr Mearns. First, I would like to apologise. I think I was supposed to be here last week but something happened.

The reason why this issue is so important was exemplified by Foreign Office questions today, when the work that the DEFRA Secretary has been doing in the last week in Malaysia was raised. As someone who lived in Tanzania for 11 years, home to what was a very large elephant population, I saw the Selous national park, which had probably 55,000 elephants in 2000 and is now down to 10,000. They are being slaughtered—not only elephants but park rangers are being slaughtered by the poachers, who usually have much more powerful weapons. One way to tackle that is by what the UK Government are doing—training people there, as we are going to do in Malawi; we are sending our armed forces to help train the anti-poaching people. Another way is to look at the ivory trade and what we can do about the UK ivory trade. We should either place a total ban or impose heavy restrictions, so that the demand for ivory is tackled.

I believe that there is a petition on this matter that has reached 80,000 signatures. It is possible that may reach 100,000 and therefore reach the Petitions Committee. No doubt you will probably take that into account in your deliberations, but we are very determined that there is an opportunity to debate this matter at length.

Q2 Bob Blackman: You have said that you will accept a Westminster Hall slot if possible. Can I just clarify? There are Westminster Hall slots becoming available on 1 December and 8 December. Would you be able to take either of those slots?

Jeremy Lefroy: Certainly the one on 8 December.

Q3 Bob Blackman: The one restriction is that that is likely to be 90 minutes as opposed to three hours.

Jeremy Lefroy: My personal view is that this is a vital matter.

Bob Blackman: I understand that.

Jeremy Lefroy: What I mean is I don't mind. As long as we debate it, 90 minutes will be fine.

Q4 Kevin Foster: Just as background, it was me who asked about the Hanoi convention this morning. In terms of the debate, what are you looking for? Is it for the Government to make commitments or are you looking to

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have a general debate around issues, perhaps particularly following on from the Hanoi convention? What are you looking to get out of the debate?

Jeremy Lefroy: Ideally, we would like the Government to make some clear commitments about what they intend to do about the ivory trade both in the UK and overseas. Clearly, we realise that there is a lot of work going on at the moment and it is more to encourage the Government on the course that they are pursuing now and to go further. The UK has shown leadership in this. His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge has also taken a great deal of interest in this. We want to encourage the Government to do more of what they are doing and to go further.

Chair: Thank you very much for your application. We will deliberate in the course of the afternoon.

Seema Malhotra and Kate Green made representations.

Q5 **Chair:** Next up, we have Seema Malhotra and Kate Green and an application based on the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Seema Malhotra: Thank you very much, Chair, for the opportunity to pitch today to the Backbench Business Committee.

This issue is timely and important because Friday 25 November marks the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. It is celebrated and recognised with 16 days of activism all over the world. Across the country in different constituencies and at national level, there will be events marking this issue. To ensure that we raise awareness of the issue and that we are within the official 16 days of campaign activism, we are proposing holding a debate in the Chamber on a substantive motion, preferably in the week commencing Monday 5 December.

We believe that it is important to hold the debate to raise awareness of the international day of action. The substantive motion addresses both the domestic and international scale of violence against women and girls. It is extremely important that we mark and recognise the day, because of the economic and social cost and the changing nature of violence against women and girls that we see in all our communities, including the impact of online abuse. The substantive motion calls for a cross-departmental approach to prevention. Holding the debate in the Chamber would give it the importance and status that it deserves.

There has been considerable cross-party interest from Labour, the Conservatives, the SNP and smaller parties. As well as those who have put their name on the motion, others have said that they wish to take part. To address the point about whether a similar debate has already taken place or is likely to take place, there was a broader debate on International Women's Day that included discussion of violence against women and girls, and a debate in February on the role of men in preventing violence against women and girls. However, it would be a significant absence on

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our part not to have a debate to mark the international day of action as part of the activity going on across the UK and the world. Thank you for your consideration.

Q6 **Chair:** Anything to add, Kate?

Kate Green: I support everything Seema says. It is important for the reputation of the country that we are seen to be taking the issue incredibly seriously. One way to do that is obviously by debating it in the Chamber. As Seema says, it is important both in terms of international influence and domestic pressure. There is also now a Brexit context, which is particularly topical this year: EU funding has supported programmes to tackle violence against women and girls, so there will be a new topicality to it that the House may want to consider.

Q7 **Bob Blackman:** You are slightly light on the number of speakers on your application, but you mentioned that others have indicated that they would wish to speak. Could you give us some details?

Seema Malhotra: I know that Rushanara Ali has added her name. Other Labour MPs are also willing to speak; it may depend on the day. Angela Crawley has said—

Q8 **Bob Blackman:** That was the other point I was coming to. You are fairly light on speakers from the Government side.

Seema Malhotra: On Government speakers?

Bob Blackman: Yes.

Seema Malhotra: I don't think having people wanting to speak on the issue would be a problem.

Bob Blackman: I am sure it wouldn't be, but we have to decide between competing bids. If we don't have the names, we have to have the confidence that people will come attend the debate. I am sure it won't be a problem, but it would help us to have the details.

Q9 **Chair:** It would be perfectly in order, though, for us to agree in principle that the debate was appropriate for the time but to ask for additional names to be added and passed to the Clerk.

Seema Malhotra: Perhaps I could also say that I have had interest in this on the Government side. I know the SNP also wants to have extra speakers.

Kate Green: Maria Miller, who is obviously a very influential voice on the Government side, has specifically indicated her support, and so has Helen Grant—so two senior Conservative women have already endorsed the debate. As Seema says and as we know, this issue transcends party politics. Whenever debates are held on these sorts of subjects, we see cross-party participation, and in a UN context that is exactly what we want.

Q10 **Bob Blackman:** I am not unsympathetic to the bid. All I am saying is that

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Chamber time is extremely precious, which you recognise, and we have other competing bids that have been waiting longer for the week that you are asking for. We have to make sure. If a debate is allocated to you—we will decide that—we have to be absolutely certain that it is going to run for its proper **duration**.

- Q11 **Mr Nuttall:** Has the draft motion been approved by the Table Office? I just have concerns about the calling on “governments around the world”. We are used to seeing motions calling on our own Government to do things from our House of Commons, but I wonder whether the Table Office will be happy with us calling on general “governments around the world”, rather than calling on our own UK Government to work with “governments around the world”. It might seem just semantics, but I have got it in the back of my mind that we have had this in the past. The Table Office might say, “It is not for this Parliament to start sending messages out around the world.” I don’t know.

Chair: I accept that, David, but this is a draft text and that can be tidied up with the assistance of our Clerk. Is that **okay**?

- Q12 **Kevin Foster:** Just to confirm, I presume you will want to encourage more male MPs to get involved and to speak. I always make the point that I should be as interested in issues that affect 52% of my constituents and the population of this country as anyone else. I can see that there are currently two—the same as with Government speakers. I am thinking about the International Women’s Day debate where Jake Berry, for example, brought up breast ironing and things that made for quite a good debate—ditto the other way around, with the recent Men’s Day debate.

Witnesses indicated assent.

Jess Phillips: I would just say, next time we see one with a list of only men, we should always say we want to encourage there to be women in that **debate**. I am just saying; I have not heard it said before.

Kevin Foster: I’d say exactly the same.

Chair: In that case, thank you for your application. We will be making deliberations. The general point I would make, and have made on a number of occasions in the Chamber, is that as much advance notice of time-sensitive debates is really helpful. We have already determined the business up to and including Thursday 1 December; in other words, this is the next available Thursday slot that we have. If people have time-sensitive debates, it does not matter if they bring them a month or six weeks early, because it gives us a chance to plan ahead, particularly with the Leader of the House. Thank you very much indeed. That concludes the formal business of the Committee; I thank everyone for their attendance. We will now go into private session.

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