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EU urged to press for u-turn over 'barbarous' Mugabe

Press Release from SNP MEP Alyn Smith

The European Union is being urged to put pressure on United Nations tourism chiefs to rethink their appointment of one of the world's most brutal dictators as an international envoy.

Scottish MEP **Alyn Smith** has written to EU Foreign Affairs High Representative Baroness Ashton asking her to formally protest against the nomination this week of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe as a tourism leader.

Mugabe, who has gained notoriety as one of Africa's most vicious tyrants, has been honoured as a "Leader for Tourism" by the Madrid-based UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). A ceremony appointing him to the role along with his political ally Michael Sata, President of Zambia, took place at the Victoria Falls on Tuesday.

In his letter to Baroness Ashton, Alyn – an MEP for the left-of-centre, autonomist Scottish National Party which is in government in Scotland - is seeking an assurance that she will write to UNWTO in Madrid protesting about the nomination and seeking its reversal.

He continues:

"I would also ask for your assurance that the EU will neither recognise this appointment nor engage with Mr Mugabe in this or any other official role."

Describing Mugabe's elevation to the role as "*bizarre, scandalous and disgraceful*", he continues in the letter: "*It also makes absolutely no sense.*

"As one of the world's most barbarous dictators, Mr Mugabe has wrecked his own tourist industry and brought Zimbabwe to the edge of economic ruin. He consistently betrays human rights, has defied democracy and uses violence to hang on to power.

"To appoint him to this position seriously damages the credibility of the UN and helps to provide legitimacy to a regime which is one of the most oppressive in Africa and beyond. It also undermines efforts to promote genuine democracy in Zimbabwe.

"Mr Mugabe is not a global tourist leader. Indeed, as an international pariah, is is exactly the opposite."

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