

Meeting of the All Party Group (APG) on Ethnic Minority Communities

Date: Tuesday 8th of November 2011

Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 29)

Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political representatives:

Chair – Steven Agnew MLA (Green Party), David McIlveen MLA (DUP), Stephen Leewery (Intern DUP), Phillip Brett (PA to Sammy Douglas MLA), Lauren Allison (PA to Anna Lo MLA), Danny Kinahan MLA (UUP), Gavin Eastwood and Andrew Meek (with Danny Kinahan).

BME sector representatives:

James Holmlund (Bahai Council for NI), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Anjela Nakazava (World Wide Women @ North Down), Kristyene Boreland (World Wide Women @ North Down), Kathryn Breen (Belfast Migrant Centre), Berta Rierola (Belfast Migrant Centre), Nikki Witten (NICEM), Mark Donahue (An Munia Tober), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Paul Yam (Wah Hep Chinese Association), Joan McGovern (Barnardos Tuar Ceatha), Hanaa Ibrahim (Egyptian Society NI), Natalia Kennedy (Egyptian Society NI), Justin Kouame (NICRAS), Lilian Vellem (MCRC), Alfred Abolarin and Joseph Ricketts (ACSONI).

1. Apologies

Political representatives:

Sammy Douglas MLA (DUP), Anna Lo MLA (Alliance), Conall McDevitt MLA (SDLP).

BME sector representatives:

Frances and Phoebe Wong (Oi Yin Chinese Women's Group), Cita Carty (North Down Filipino Group), Afaf Aly (Egyptian Society of NI), Bobby Rao (Strabane Ethnic Communities Association), Eddie Kerr (SEEDS), Edwin Graham (Bahai Council for NI), Barry Fitzpatrick (NICEM), Muhammad Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre), Moira McCombe (NICRAS), Ivy Ridge (Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum), Eileen Chan-Hu (Chinese Welfare Association).

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

Immigration Seminar follow-up letter to Mike Golden:

The secretariat, in coordination with the representatives from the Law Centre, NICRAS and the Belfast Migrant Centre drafted a letter to Mike Golden. The Letter was circulated by email and paper copy to the group for comments and approval. The letter was approved. ACTION: chair to send the letter to Mike Golden

Follow up Assembly Questions

After the discussion at the October meeting, Assembly questions were drafted in conjunction with the secretariat for political members of the APG as a follow up to issues raised. A question was prepared for the Minister for Justice regarding the introduction of EU Directive

2010/16 in relation to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings. A question was also posed regarding the introduction of legislation on Human Trafficking. A question was also prepared regarding a European Directive which would establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of the victims of crime.

Patrick Yu explained that he was at a conference in Germany in June 2011 where the DG Justice Commissioner raised concerns on the need for specific legislation regarding interpreting. Patrick raised the issue of specific vulnerable groups such as the LGBT community and Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, the legislation is currently very general and covers only children and general issues of domestic violence.

Steven will try to submit the questions this afternoon so the Minister can give an answer before next meeting in December.

Membership request from the Labour Party NI:

AS was discussed at the previous meeting the terms of reference of All Party Groups only allow for elected members of the assembly to be political members. The Labour Party does not currently fall into this category. The Chair said that he would draft a reply swiftly and ascertained that all members agreed that the Labour Party was not excluded on political grounds but simply because they are not currently members of the Assembly. All members agreed on this point. Steven said that the Green Party had been in the same position and had to wait to have an elected representative in the Assembly to join All Party Groups.

4. Presentation from the Prison Service NI on the recruitment of Ethnic Minorities.

Teresa Hewitt and her colleague Brian Millard were not able to attend the meeting today due to pressing matters in relation to the current review of the Prison service.

Patrick provided some background information on this matter. The Prison Service are trying to encourage Black and Minority Ethnic individuals to apply for positions, as there are no BME individuals currently employed in the service. This is a very welcome move as many challenges still remain for ethnic minorities to be employed in within the Criminal Justice agencies, including the Police Service. The Criminal Justice agencies require potential employees to pass an English and general aptitude test prior to invitation to an interview, and this disadvantages those who do not have English as their first language and knowledge of local information/culture.

Patrick gave brief figures on foreign nationals in prison: Ethnic minorities represent 5% to 8% of the NI population, however they represent 10% to 12% of the prison population.

A very large proportion of those prisoners are on remand. They have been charged by the police but haven't been through court proceedings yet. Many of the prisoners held on remand are from the Chinese community and have been arrested following the dismantling of "cannabis factories". The trials in those cases are very complex. Many of those prisoners have no passport or formal identification and the gang element makes it difficult to identify the victims of trafficking to the gang masters.

The opening of borders also attracts criminality and gang elements. This was illustrated at the last meeting with regard to the presentations of the PSNI and the DOJ on trafficking issues. There are many issues of concern regarding the Criminal Justice system and ethnic minorities, the APG represents a useful mechanism for addressing these issues.

A review report has recently been published on the Prison Service. The report shows an increase of gang related activity, racial attacks and unequal treatment between groups. ACTION: Patrick will circulate it to the group

Justin Kouame explained that individuals with refugee status are highly limited in applying for positions in the Criminal Justice Agencies. It is often impossible for them to pass security checks, as there is little or no communication with the home countries to verify such information (past addresses etc.). Has any work been done on that issue?

Steven said that this is already an issue at the European level and is exacerbated for non-EU nationals.

5. Group Presentation

The Chair apologised to Mark Donahue of An Munia Tober for having to cancel their presentation last month, he welcomed his presentation at this months meeting,

Mark Donahue, An Munia Tober

An Munia Tober is a Travellers organisation with a centre based in West Belfast. It has a unique position, as it is the only Travellers organisation in Belfast.

It is estimated that around 3900 Travellers live in Northern Ireland and a quarter of them live in West Belfast. There are approximately 40 000 Travellers living on the island of Ireland.

Over the years, An Munia Tober has fostered a positive relationship with members of the community, the organisation mostly employs Travellers, which is not the case for most of the other Travellers support groups.

An Munia Tober provides a wide range of Travellers support services, this includes youth and children's services, education, accommodation, health, training and capacity building, employment support, guidance and support to challenge racism and discrimination.

Discrimination is experienced on a daily basis by most Travellers and Gypsies, discrimination affects every area of Travellers' life:

- 3 out of 4 Travellers experience discrimination in getting accommodation;
- 7 out of 10 Travellers experience discrimination at school, being served in a pub or shop;
- 6 out of 10 Travellers have difficulty gaining employment, and/or experience discrimination from the PSNI or Courts;
- Over 50% of Travellers experience discrimination at work, or when receiving health care.

These figures are appalling, especially 15 years after the Race Relations Order was passed. Much work still needs to be done to recognise Travellers Human Rights. An Munia Tober also provides cultural awareness and anti-racism training and works closely with NICEM and the Equality Commission. Travellers are encouraged to take legal action on discrimination cases. Mark cited the case of a Traveller woman who recently won a discrimination case against the Education and Library Board.

There are particularly severe inequalities for the Traveller community in relation to health. The "All Ireland Traveller Health Study" report found that:

- 70% of Travellers are aged between 0 - 30 years
- 20% of Travellers are aged between 30 - 44 years
- 9% of Travellers are aged between 45 - 64 years
- Only 1% of Travellers are aged over 65 years

The priority health issues are:

- Mortality rates for Travellers are 3.5 times higher than that of the general population.
- Infant mortality rates for Travellers are 3 times higher than that of the general population.
- Life expectancy for male Travellers are 15 years lower than that of the general population, and 11 years lower for women.
- Suicide rates for male Travellers are 6.6 times higher than that of the general population.

Heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and suicide are the main causes for death of Travellers adults. For young people, those are drugs, alcohol abuse and suicide.

With regards to housing over half of the Traveller population now live in houses or flats, compared to 10 years ago when it was around 20%, 23.8% still live in trailers or mobile homes (of which only 21% live on serviced sites and 7% live on unserviced sites, that is to say on the side of roads). An Munia Tober have a Floating Support Worker working closely with the NI Housing Executive and housing associations.

With regard to education, training and employment issues, the Traveller community has some of the highest level of unemployment in Northern Ireland. Very few Travellers have formal qualifications and are unlikely to take up places in Government training schemes. Most are self-employed in various traditional trades. Discrimination in the formal and informal economy is very problematic and generally Travellers hide their ethnic identity to pursue work opportunities. An Munia Tober provides education, training and pre-employment support.

The organisation also provides youth services and children's art programmes to enhance self-esteem and confidence. This is a vital support service. Many young Travellers are disengaged from school due to bullying. A school in West Belfast contains 98% Traveller children, effectively segregating Traveller children from the wider population. It shows that challenging racism and social exclusion is a necessity.

An Munia Tober have been doing a lot of work on racism in the media, most recently in light of the Dale Farm issue. An Munia Tober also works on lobbying and with key partners in the Department of Education and the Department of Health.

Steven said that the Life in Times survey that was published recently on the attitudes of people towards people from different ethnic backgrounds found that a vast majority of people do not want to have neighbours from the Travellers community. The highest level of intolerance displayed is toward Travellers. Steven asked if any work has been done with the local communities? Mark answered An Munia Tober provides anti-racism and awareness training, youth work, and works on the media's relayed negative images.

Steven asked about the size of the organisation. Mark answered that there are 8 employees. However, the current stream of funding ends in March 2012.

Steven remarked that there is the perspective of some that if Travellers are living in houses rather than caravans they are no longer Travellers. Mark answered that being a Traveller is an identity that goes beyond where one resides. Travellers have their own customs, beliefs and language.

Danny Kinahan expressed his shock at the statistics given in relation to health. The issue should be pushed through. Danny asked what were the most pressing issues today. Mark explained that the All Ireland Health Study is the first of its kind. It was a joint project from the Department of Health in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. The study is very comprehensive; the summary document alone contains 500 pages.

Patrick explained that an Audit of Inequalities has been published recently, highlighting the most pressing issues. ACTION: Patrick will circulate this.

Paul Yam queried whether Mark had seen any improvements while working for An Munia Tober, and what he would like to see happen in relation to the Traveller community. Mark advised that the first priority is accommodation; proper, safe and culturally acceptable accommodation. Once this is in place, health and education will improve as a result. He would also like to see more internal representation, with Travellers advocating and speaking on behalf of their own people.

Joan McGovern explained that she had been involved with Travellers since 1993, and felt that education was a key factor in the employability of Travellers. The first barrier that may hit when applying for jobs is a lack of basic schooling. She also remarked that if Travellers are not integrated at the primary level they are more likely to drop out of secondary school. Joan also noticed that despite the work that has been done by organisations for many years to promote Travellers issues, Travellers are still not feeling confident enough to stand up and speak up for themselves. There is a failure somewhere.

Steven advised that should An Munia Tober have issues they would like raised, he was happy to put questions to the Assembly.

The Sudanese Association was not available to present on that day and will be rescheduled.

6. AOB

Steven suggested that a seminar on hate-crime and human trafficking could be organised in January, it could use the same model that the Immigration seminar that took place in September. The seminar would take place in the morning just before the All Party group meeting. ACTION: The secretariat will organize a seminar to take place on the 10th January 2012.

Natalia Kennedy from the Egyptian Society informed the group that she was helping to commence a support group for Eastern European nationals. While there is a few well organised Polish groups, there are none for the wider Eastern European community. Other Eastern European communities have different needs and have troubles accessing services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau due to the language barrier. Natalia is looking for support

to help establish that support group and wishes to help build capacity and self-representation from that community.

Joan McGovern advised that she is looking for a Somali female interpreter to help with the start-up of a Somali woman's group. Joseph Ricketts said he might know someone who could help and he will forward her contact details. Alfred Abolarin explained that ACSONI have changed their name from the Afro Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland to African Caribbean Support Organisation Northern Ireland. The acronym remains identical.

7. Date of next meeting

13th of December 2011

12:00 for a 12.30 start, Senate Chamber