

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

Date: Tuesday 10th of January 2012

Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Senate Chambers)

Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political representatives:

Chair – David McIlveen MLA (DUP), Helen Clarke (on behalf of Chris Lyttle MLA), Lauren Allison (on behalf of Anna Lo MLA), Michelle Byrne (on behalf of Conall McDevitt MLA).

BME sector representatives:

James Holmlund (Bahai Council for NI), Alfred Abolarin (ACSONI), Helena Macormac (NICEM), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Muhammad Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Hanna Ibrahim (The Egyptian Society NI), Kristyene Boreland (World Wide Women @ North Down), Anjela Nakazava (World Wide Women @ North Down), Justin Kouame (NICRAS), Paul Yam (Wah Hep Chinese Association), Natalia Kennedy (Eastern European Support NI), Jacob Rostrzewski, Laura Baxter and Marian Burgess (NICEM interns), Jiangliang Gao (Mandarin Speakers Association), Ivy Ridge (Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum), Eileen Chan-Hu (Chinese Welfare Association), Eddis Nicholl (NICEM), Joan McGovern (Barnardo's Tuar Ceatha)

Robbie McVeigh (researcher).

1. Apologies

Political representatives:

Steven Agnew MLA (Green Party), Chris Lyttle MLA (Alliance Party), Anna Lo MLA (Alliance Party), Danny Kinahan MLA (UUP).

BME sector representatives:

Bobby Rao (Strabane Ethnic Community Association), Edwin Graham (Bahai Council for NI), Maciek Bator (Polish Association NI).

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

Human Trafficking and Hate Crime seminar follow-up:

David McIlveen congratulated the group on the success of the seminar, he said that the All Party Group is one of the most sophisticated and influential All Party groups and that the group is in a good place to take the lead on important issues and to create a concrete agenda for the Assembly.

As Ken Fraser was unable to attend the meeting there was additional time on the agenda. David suggested that the additional time could be used to continue discussions from the morning seminar on Human Trafficking and Hate Crime invited comments from the groups;

Eileen Chan-Hu said the seminar was very useful but failed to recognise the role of the NGOs and community organisations in supporting the victims and dealing with those issues.

Eileen explained that statistics show that the number of hate crimes are going down but we should not be complacent. The number of racial hate crime and the level of tension in some areas is still very high. Black and Minority Ethnic organisations do a lot of work with the communities for prevention and support to victims.

The Chinese Welfare Association has been very active in the area of trafficking and the statutory organisations need to work closer with community groups and recognise the role NGOs can also play in awareness raising campaigns.

David agreed with Eileen and reiterated that the role of community groups couldn't be underestimated. Groups have direct contacts with the community they represent. Statistics need to be put to test. We should bring the seminar speakers back in a few months and ask for what concrete steps have taken place since.

The All Party group should be a mechanism to hold the government into account and bring counter-statistics.

Joan McGovern explained that she had been working for many years on issues of Domestic Violence. Like sexual exploitation, this was an issue that very few people wanted to hear about, which does not make the issue go away. During the seminar in the morning, Eamon Jones mentioned that the new Race Strategy must address the causes. The parliament and political parties should work better together to address painful and difficult issues. It is understandable that many political parties have different perspectives and there may be a lack of will to address issues around sexual exploitation and prostitution but they should be addressed anyhow.

Joan also expressed her concerns over the lack of information and movement around the CSI programme and the Racial Equality Strategy. Will the new Racial Equality Strategy be published this year? It is crucial to have a robust framework and action plan attached to it.

Eddis Nicholl supported Joan's comments. Twenty years ago Domestic Violence was a taboo subject and it has taken a lot of work and campaigning to remove that taboo and change the law. Eddis also wanted to stress the issue of Asylum seekers and vulnerable people, CSI and the RES should be established as soon as possible in order to address these issues.

David replied that the CSI programme was not in final stages yet. Some issues are sensitive and more work needs to be done. David said he would ask about the Racial Equality Strategy and will report back to the group.

David reminded the role of the Assembly and the need to hear from the public what issues need to be addressed. MLAs have the ability to present motions to the Assembly and ask ministers to act in particular ways. All the actions of the assembly are open and public (apart for a few executive meetings). MLAs need to get the material from the communities and bring more motions to the assembly.

Patrick Yu explained that the lack of movement on the CSI and RES was the reason for inviting Ken Fraser to come to the meeting today. Some issues are outstanding since last year.

The last meeting of the Racial Equality Panel took place last June and a working group was set up with the first meeting in August. The panel members agreed that the officials should use the summer time to write the new strategy chapter by chapter and send it to working group

members for comment. The meeting in August was a short one as no written work had been done. The OFMDFM need to explain why nothing has happened since then.

Patrick also explained that the seminar is only the starting point of the process. This morning's seminar was the second organised on Human Trafficking. The first one took place in 2008. Representatives from the Poppy Project came to speak and few other people who had an impact on writing UK legislation. If we compare the 2 seminars, it is great to see the changes that took place. In 2006, officials had said that there was no human trafficking in Northern Ireland.

We need to bring more open debates in the Assembly and put forward motion debates but we need to be very clear and precise on the issues. In the seminar, there was a focus on the criminal justice side but attention also needs to be given to the perpetrators and users of sexual services. There are many implications in terms of public health and public safety (disease transmission). We need to also look at wider issues such as family and relationship break down, etc.. It is more important to focus on the victims and victims' support.

The Minister of Justice has already agreed after a question from this group that the new Directive on Victims' Rights will be enforced. Victims can also be witnesses in some cases. Patrick said further work should be done with the Justice Committee on Hate Crime and Human Trafficking issues.

ACTION: David will put a question to the Assembly today on progress on the Racial Equality Strategy.

Paul Yam expressed concerns about the lack of resources and the OFMDFM. In absence of Ken Fraser, one of his colleagues should have come to report back to us. The Racial Equality Strategy might be finally implemented but Paul was concerned as to the resourcing of it? The Ethnic Minority Development Fund is running out again in the end of March, which creates many uncertainties about the future for the groups. We need to set the priority.

Patrick explained that the RES and EMDF are different and both issues must be addressed separately.

David agreed that money is an issue and cuts have an impact everywhere. He warned that the distribution of funds may create tensions. If the budgets of schools are drastically reduced but funding for ethnic minority groups remain the same, it might created a negative perception, although the funding strands are not linked.

David reminded the group that there are other strands of funding available for Black and Minority Ethnic groups, such as the Social Investment Fund for example. The EMDF should not be given up but groups are advised to be very pro-active and seek any other resources they can. There are around 2500 funders, 50 of them who provide funding on a regular basis. NICVA have a search mechanism on their website called "Grant Tracker", it will search all the available funds and can be accessed at their offices.

Eileen explained that the Chinese Welfare Association has been actively seeking to access other funds but have not been able to as a clause in the receipt of OFMDFM core funding prevents you from applying to any other similar funds.

David said that the Community Relations Council is funded through the Executive and limited funds are distributed through the Executive. Groups should also keep in mind European funding.

Letter to Mike Golden, follow-up on the immigration seminar:

No reply was received yet.

Letter to the Immigration Minister (regarding the issue that only MP's , not MLAs can contact the UKBA in relation to immigration issues affecting constituents) :

Michelle Byrne explained that Conall McDevitt had also been writing to the Immigration Minister, the UKBA, the Home Secretary and a number of other stakeholders about the issue, this letter was sent on the 19th of December, but a reply hasn't been received yet. Further information can be given to the secretariat to circulate amongst the group.

Launch of the Filipino Research:

Patrick confirmed that the launch of the research on the Filipino community would take place on the 23rd of January 2012 in the Long Gallery, Stormont from 18:00 to 20:00.

Everybody is welcome.

4. Dr Robbie McVeigh on the racial hate crime research

Robbie gave an overview of the research he had previously conducted on policing and racist violence in Northern Ireland: "the Next Stephen Lawrence?" was published in 2006. The recent convictions on the Stephen Lawrence murder do not bring a close to the case. If we can see how far we have gone since the McPherson Enquiry, we can also still see how far we still have to go, particularly in Northern Ireland.

The "Next Stephen Lawrence?" research report catalogued and analyzed incidents encountered by NICEM's hate crime support work. Reporting was not the only issue; there were also many examples of bad practice. Seven years after that research report, Patrick asked for a follow-up piece that would extend to the whole criminal justice system. One of the key findings of the report is that there has been very little change.

If changes have been instituted in England and Wales there unfortunately has been very little change here. Northern Ireland does not have to mimic the model of England and Wales but the main recommendations of the McPherson report have not been implemented in Northern Ireland, this has been to the detriment of victims in NI.

Robbie said that he is very interested to hear about the experiences of BME groups and individuals in Northern Ireland and encourages anybody interested to contact him.

At the core of what is missing in Northern Ireland is an in-depth analysis of ethnicity in police procedures, particularly in stop and searches procedures. Detailed ethnic monitoring is taking place in England and Wales, which is not the case here.

In Scotland, the devolved administration responded well to the McPherson recommendations and started a complete re-examining of their practices, which hasn't been done in NI. Some structural changes have also been taking place such as the introduction of Hate Crime scrutiny panels. There has been a cultural shift in policing in Scotland that was also encouraged by the new devolved administration and the new police officers coming in post.

It has now been 10 years since England and Wales have implemented the recommendations, which leaves Northern Ireland far behind. Northern Ireland needs to have a worldwide perspective; there are many models of good practice all around the world that could work here.

Robbie said that there is a positive political consensus on Race in Northern Ireland that could be pushed further. Equality Impact Assessments need to be conducted adequately and departmental agencies need to put Race Relations Officers in place. Even if the budget is tight, those changes are necessary.

The All Party Group is a crucial mechanism that could drive this forward. People must understand that race and racism are everybody's responsibility. There needs to be consciousness raising so that police officers do not perceive monitoring and other processes as additional paperwork but rather as a crucial step.

Alfred Abolarin said that during the morning's seminar, Eamon Jones mentioned a Hate Crime response scheme. Is the same thing taking place in Scotland?

Robbie replied that this was the case. Scotland has been efficient on the policy side and it transformed the experiences of communities on the ground. Of course there are still things to do but the leadership has been good.

Ivy Ridge asked if Robbie was still interested to meet with Black and Ethnic Minority groups in Northern Ireland for the research. Robbie said that he would really like to meet with as many groups as possible in Northern Ireland and asked anybody interested to please contact him.

5. Ken Fraser, OFMDFM, on the progress of the revisited Racial Equality Strategy

Due a clash with Colin Jack's diary no representative from the OFMDFM was able to attend the meeting.

6. AOB

Patrick has received a request from a BME group in Newtownards to join the All Party Group and asked if anybody had objection against it. Patrick will circulate further details to the group when he receives their formal request.

Patrick said the NICEM's Filipino research would be launched on Monday 23rd January, invitations have been emailed out and everyone is welcome to attend.

Alfred invited groups to an event organised by ACSONI which would include the launch of a chamber of commerce and an intercultural women's network.

Helena said that if anyone would like to do a 5 minute group presentation please could they get in touch with the secretariat.

7. Date of next meeting: 14th of February 2012