

**All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities**

**Date:** Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

**Time:** 15.30

**Venue:** Room 115, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

**In attendance:**

*Political Representatives*

Bronwyn McGahan MLA (Sinn Fein)

Anna Lo MLA (Alliance)

*Speakers*

Bharat Sharma (Indian Community Centre)

*Community Representatives*

Patrick Yu (Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities)

Lumturi Podrimaj (Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers)

Justine Kouame (Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers)

Anwar Mady (Belfast Islamic Centre)

M. Khan (Belfast Islamic Centre)

Dr Katy Radford MBE (Institute for Conflict Research/Belfast Jewish Community)

Olivia Lucas (Institute for Conflict Research)

Kristyene Boreland (Chinese Welfare Association)

Joseph Ricketts (African and Caribbean Support NI)

Frances Wong (Oi Yin Women's Group)

James Holmland (Baha'I NI)

Dr. Abdelrahman (Sudanese Community Association NI)

Paul Yam (Wah Hep)

Nick Cassidy (Omagh Ethnic Community Support Group)

Luke Kelly (Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities)

**1. Apologies**

Pam Cameron MLA

Phoebe Wong (Oi Yin Women's Group)

**2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting**

Bronwyn McGahan (BM) assumes the chair.

BM: We will take a page by page approval of the minutes.

Minutes approved.

### **3. Matters arising from the last meeting**

#### **(i) APG submission to Education Authority**

BM: The APG submission to the EA is attached. So, it's there to note?

Patrick Yu (PY): Yes

BM: OK, noted.

#### **(ii) Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy (print-out of email from the DoJ and DHSSPS provided)**

PY: I think I will give a little explanation. In the APG's April meeting, we were organising two sets of presentations, from the operational policing side and voluntary organisations. So the police did come to present on their Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy and we went to the DoJ and DHSSPS and they said that their Strategy is not developed yet, so they cannot come. They will be able to come in September or October.

### **4. Presentation from the Indian Community Centre (ICC)**

BM: Now a presentation from the ICC.

Bharat Sharma (BS): Basically, the ICC is officially 33 years old. It was established at 86 Clifton Street, next door to the Orange Hall. We have survived the years, represented the voice of all Indians from all places in India and all Indian cultures at that address and thank God we're well embedded in this society. With representation or via connections with the Indian Government, through the High Commission of India in London and via various consulates, we are known to them. We have done our duties for India, living here whenever we were asked to present our identity and our presence and our duties to the local community as well as the Indian community and to India in general. Back before, there was a disaster in Cork where 329 people died in a plane crash going from Canada to the UK and it was blown up by terrorists. At that time, with so many Indian people on board, on this whole island there was only one organisation - the ICC - that did its duty by sending a priest from our temple to perform the last rites for those people. And both governments north and south and the Indian Government expressed their approval. The ICC has established its presence and importance, both with the Indian Government and here in local society. At this house, Stormont, and with the local Government we even went throughout the trouble where central Government was running the administration here. The ICC was forefront, doing its best for the society in total. Whenever we were asked to represent the Indian community and the needs of the Indian community, basically we were asked to put our thoughts among, after the peace process began, and we were asked to put our input into making some sort of a racial equality laws or rules and with NICEM - being established at that time - we did our duty. So basically, we have done whatever was asked for us at a local level. We have done outreach programmes for many years and at the education level we have lots of students come to us for cultural talks and so on. The ICC is there for everybody and not just Indian people. It is there for local people to come and enjoy the building, as it is a heritage building. But also, if there were any groups who would like to come and take part in activities/celebrations or even hold their own activities/celebrations here, we are there to implement that. And it gives me a great pleasure to say there is- roundabout the

time of when the festival of lights is held by the Indian community – there is, I'm not very good at the Irish language (!) - there is Samhain it is held and that was combined in the old waterworks and that was a fantastic event, appreciated by the community at the time. So we do our best and hold pride in saying that we are not here as outsiders but we are here as part of the community. On the note of the future of our communities' drive and thriving in NI, it is basically that integration is always the up front and that covers all aspects, from community, individuality, to whatever we can serve in at any level of society's requirement and basically to unite the communities in any which way we can, whether they are other neighbourly communities from other parts of the world living here, or right next door to each other. Basically, we have huge facilities up there at the ICC – halls, kitchens - so many, many organisations take advantage of that when booking conferences and so on. And we do our best to accommodate them all. And basically with any opportunity we get the chance, we are not- we are not exclusive. So basically, my message to everybody is take advantage of us being there, be part of us and let us be part of you. And unfortunately one thing I will say, like all of us here from different backgrounds, we are not very well supported by this House or on the Government level by OFMDFM, even though we are the oldest representation and the only representatives of Indian community who employs, by the way- we have been here since the 1930s and before, our people. We are well established amongst the community at large – the average distance of an Indian family here is about 20 miles apart, spread all over NI. We're in the South- in NI I'm happy to say at the time of the Troubles, our people were in the textile business employed and we were supporting roughly 3,500 people employment-wise, local employers. And now things have changed- we are supporting about 5,500 local workers. So the Indian community is playing its part at every level at, as you know, all Government service Departments, including the NHS and universities. We have Indian IT workers, medical workers. So basically some people say that the NHS is run by Indian people(!) But those are the things and so we have just celebrated our 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary at the ICC and I hope we will be here for thousands of years to come.

## 5. Q&A

BM: Thank you. As somebody who sits on the Committee of OFMDFM, I would encourage you to write to OFMDFM asking them to make a Committee visit to your community centre and get a tour. I know I would be interested in visiting your community centre. And as you know, OFMDFM has responsibility for Together: Building a United Community and the Racial Equality Strategy, so I would encourage you to write to OFMDFM. You mentioned 5,500 workers. I saw figures saying that 30% of doctors and 40% of nurses come from the Indian and Filipino communities.

BS: It is true! And at all consultant levels. And I also forgot to mention one thing - recently, about 2 weeks ago, we had done an internal within the ICC and we had installed deities within the temple. Basically, we had Indian community people who came for a three-day function from South and North. It all went well, but the one thing I like to highlight is where the local Government failed to unite both Northern and Southern Ireland, with this function Indian people at least did what they couldn't achieve. Over 400 people came and attended this function and about 250 came from the South and rest from North.

BM: Did no politicians attend? Did you invite them?

BS: I don't think we did, because apparently we are not very well supported by OFMDFM. There're only three people who are the main workers at the moment; the secretary, our treasurer and myself. But we can't do everything and this function was organised by one of our communities – the Tamil community - and basically it was a function to be proud of, which we can sing about in time to come.

PY: I think I will contribute more about the history. I think you mention the medical profession. It goes back to the conflict. At the time, no doctors would come from GB or the South - the only ones who would come were from the Indian community, the Muslim community etc. So if you look at these communities, they're largely professional, different from other communities. And now because of inward investment, we have a lot of IT firms from Indian subcontinent moving to set up operations here, so this is why there's a trend here towards more Indian IT experts training up local workers.

BM: Any other questions?

Justin Kouame (JK): I would like to thank you for your presentation. I am surprised and shocked that you have no funding from OFMDFM. You have the track record, whereas some who have received funding do not. That's why I remember Anna Lo asking Lindsay Farrow about the procedures for allocating funding. The level of expertise, knowledge and activity from some of those allocated funding is lacking compared to our organisations, who have not received funding.

BS: I just want to make one point, it seems as though the ones who deserve genuinely the OFMDFM funding support for community centres and members, don't seem to be getting it. But yet, OFMDFM is funding private organisations i.e. not community based organisations – ARTSEKTA, I will name it, it's not community-backed. It is just an arts kind of movement, where it is being supported to the tune of over maybe £100,000 and yet people like us who have already established doing the work at the level of society are not being appreciated.

BM: Thank you for your comments, but I would say in terms of funding, there is a competitive process and when it comes to the European Social Fund, as Anna Lo would know, there was a question mark over how Departments carry out their processes and that was robustly analysed by ourselves. So now there are robust processes in place and we would be in trouble if they were not.

BS: I will not withdraw my point. There is something wrong in OFMDFM that ARTSEKTA are being funded to the tune of £100,000.

Anna Lo (AL): I don't think so, they are funded by the Arts Council-

BS: We don't even have a receptionist being funded at the ICC.

AL: You didn't get funding from OFMDFM? Did you ask for feedback?

BS: We were told that we fell short on points. And it's, to be honest, red tape. It's something I can just basically get frustrated about. But it is not a process which is being administrated correctly by Stormont.

BM: I would dispute that.

BS: With respect to yourself, I appreciate your enthusiasm. But the fact is there.

AL: I'm sorry, we have to challenge you.

BM: I appreciate your concerns, but it isn't something we can address here in this room. You should write to OFMDFM and maybe make an informal meeting with the Committee for OFMDFM and we would be happy to follow up with officials.

AL: Did you appeal? There is an appeal mechanism in place, is there not?

PY: The first stage is getting feedback, then you can do a formal appeal if you aren't satisfied.

BS: Our three workers are professionals, businessmen and medical professionals, so we don't have the time.

Anwar Mady (AM): I just would like to comment on this, the idea of the ICC and the issue of not getting OFMDFM funding, which is a surprise to me as well. When I look at India itself, it is an embodiment of diversity and multiculturalism.

(AL leaves)

I would say that this sort of diversity and multiculturalism from the ICC is not found, in my opinion. I represent the Belfast Islamic Centre (BIC) and Patrick Yu said there are some Indian and Muslim professionals. I have so many Indian Muslims from India who come to the BIC and I speak to them about the ICC as a place to visit, but they do not. They feel it is representing only the majority Hindu faith in India. I feel that this is one of the things that should be looked at by the ICC. I have been there - we had a breakfast five years ago at Ramadan. The food served was no meat and we asked why and they said that because there is a temple here, we cannot bring meat inside. But I said that you should be representing everyone, not just Hindus. I think this should be looked at.

Joseph Ricketts (JR): OK, I am saying this because I know many years ago ACSONI was unable to access OFMDFM funding. So as a group, we had to look at all our policies/internal documentations and also seek help from different groups so we could score better next time on the funds. I know there are a lot of criteria on it. Maybe in the future you could look at getting help in terms of doing an application. The ICC stands a great chance as a specialised association, so maybe you could look at that for the next round.

BM: And that's where an informal meeting can address all of those issues with the Committee for OFMDFM and I know we have no Traveller communities, for example, have received funding, which is concerning to me.

JR: If their groups aren't funded, how can they cut some of the red tape and get support?

BM: And I agree with you, but in terms of red tape for example, one of the groups sent an application two minutes after the deadline and it wasn't accepted. So you need to be prepared, you need to be careful.

BS: I just wanted to clarify this gentleman's couple of points. I appreciate these points, but I need to clarify: one, no Indian Muslim has ever asked for any kind of service that he or she has been refused. People do come to us if they need help with passports or visas that need to be sent to the Indian High Commission. And two, regarding the food, we bought this building in 1979 from the Belfast City Council. It used to be part of Carlisle Memorial Church and in the covenant of this building – not by us – it was already written that we cannot serve any alcohol, any meat, fish or egg in this property or consume or bring it in. Or any kind of gambling or games. That was written before we even bought the property in the covenant. So the thing is, that's one thing we have to do. Forget about Hinduism and vegetarianism and every Committee and Board of the ICC over the years have to adhere by that agreement.

Paul Yam (PYa): I know you run a successful elderly luncheon club. With the restriction of funding, are you still running those? I know you have an aging population, like us.

Mr Khan: Was there ever an application to change this Covenant?

BS: There was a two-year battle through legal channels, but it was concluded that the covenant cannot be changed. To answer Mr Yam, what we have to do is- we have two senior citizens' clubs within the Indian community- one within the ICC and one without – and they both have their own identities under which they apply for grants. But also, they pay towards their functions, so that's how they're managed.

PYa: I was more curious about what activities you do.

BS: They go out on visits, they exchange with other senior citizens clubs within society. They do bus trips and all sorts of activities. Last week, it was Belfast City Hall and the bus took them from the ICC to the City Hall. But we don't instruct or interfere in their management, they manage it themselves.

William Olphert (WO): Like the Chinese community, we share the fact that we're here for a long time and have some properties that we associate with the community. There might be a creative way that the Chinese and Indian communities could get together and do something. We had the Sudanese community come in for an Eid celebration, for example.

BS: We would love to do it. Even within our community, weddings are something rarely held at the ICC. The reason for it is because we cannot consume alcohol and meat – because of that, our weddings are attacked within our own community. So we also are a little bit restricted. If out of almost 52 weeks in a year, we get about 38 organisations almost every week booking the ICC for their different events and we include providing food for them, but we cannot provide non-vegetarian food. So we're doing ok at that.

Kristyene Boreland (KB): I think that even though the covenant is quite unusual, maybe you could start a programme on healthy eating and vegetarianism.

BS: We have an application in that area, that every month we have at least one function and that function has at least two courses. Anybody is welcome to promote that and a lot of local vegetarians already know that. We let people know when the next function is through our website.

Nick Cassidy (NC): What is the logic behind the covenant, as regards meat?

BS: That, I cannot answer. Carlisle Memorial Church made these restrictions. The new generation of Indian community members – around 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation – they want parties, alcohol. But we can't even get a one-day license to do that, because of the covenant.

PY: I think so far, this is a listed building, so you can see it is quite unusual for an Indian temple to be built inside a church building. I think the ICC is just using a part of it?

BS: Yes, just part of it to promote culture. Not only the Indian Hindu community, but the Pakistani community also paid donations to erect something, because it was a first in NI of any kind representing any communities from Asia, to have a community centre.

BM: I read Benazir Bhutto's autobiography, it was very interesting. She did allude to the conflict that was here, in NI as well. I found it interesting that she did mention that while she was imprisoned, a sympathetic guard passed her a newspaper and she noted in her diary the death of Bobby Sands.

## **6. AOB**

PY: A couple of events this week and next week.

AM: Ramadan will start this week or next week.

JK: Refugee week was launched yesterday and the Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) celebrated this, alongside the change in healthcare regulations. There will be one week of activities from the 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>. You're welcome to attend any event as you wish. My last point will be on the OFMDFM funding, because we received a letter about money. We don't know how long we're going to wait for money to come in – we're a small organisation and these delays hit us hard.

PY: Anwar, perhaps you could explain more about Ramadan, as not everyone in attendance may know about it.

AM: Ramadan is the month of fasting for Muslims, it's a lunar month – so decided by the sighting of the moon. So today, if people, sighted the moon after sunset, then Ramadan will start tomorrow. If not, then it will start on Thursday. It will be 29 or 30 days. Fasting in Islam is to abstain completely from eating and drinking from daybreak – 2.45am – until sunset – 10.06pm. Because Ramadan rotates over the year – sometimes it comes in summer and sometimes in winter – it's very easy in winter (!), but not so much in the summer. The days now are 19 hours and 20 minutes! However, Muslims are trained in fasting, it is part of Muslim culture to train the children to fast. For children it is a sign of adulthood, so they are happy to be able to complete even one day. Here, it is the length of the time during the day that is the problem – in my country, back home at Egypt, it is much shorter, 15 hours only. But it is very, very hot, so some people prefer to stay here! At the BIC, we have a programme for Ramadan. One of the main items of the programme is to prepare food every day, so that people can come and break fast together – we cater for 125 people every day. After the food, there will be a prayer. It's a time for celebration and the first day of Muslim celebration will be the first day in the month following the month of Ramadan, called Eid – the day of breaking the fast.

JK: As part of the Ramadan event, every year NICRAS opens its door to our Muslim members and we use our funding to cook food.

AM: And I believe the Sudanese community has its own place to provide food.

JK: The Sudanese Community Association NI provides food and we use our premises

WO: This Sunday coming, there will be the Chinese dragon boat event. It's open to everyone, but if you're fasting for 17 days, I think you might have trouble (!). We have a few full teams left, a boat has to have a minimum of 13, a maximum of 17 – so, any individuals or community groups who want to do a bit of rowing...(!). It's not funded this year, so it's £180 per boat. There will be catering and a vegetarian option. Thursday is our cut-off day. Visit [www.cwa-ni.org](http://www.cwa-ni.org) to register.

JR: On Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June at the CWA, ACSONI will conduct an event to bring together the community and also health practitioners around sickle cell anaemia. There is a lack of awareness of this condition and the dangers it presents. We did a regional mental health bid that has been won by the Stronger Together Network. So there will be research into the needs of BME mental health and we are calling on BME groups to participate in the research.

PY: The last issue, about follow-up with Fane St Primary - after we met the local community groups, we didn't realise there has been a working group of the schools working together, mainly the officials from the Education Authority (EA) and the three principals of the schools, alongside the community groups in Donegal Rd and Sandy Row area. But they never have any representation from BME community members. So after the meeting with them, they now invite us to be representatives over there, so the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) will put



forward some nominations, mainly those from parents in the area. We will have one from the Somali community and the Muslim community, who represent nearly half of the BME population at the school. It also has a number of Roma pupils, so the South Belfast Roundtable put forward a Roma worker. Also in relation to the whole process, the EA has not satisfied their Section 75 equality duty. We approached the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and they asked us if we could find a parent to submit a complaint under the Section 75 process. We would like one from each school, so if you know any willing parties, please let us know.

Mr Khan: Just to let you know, that anyone is welcome at the Ramadan events at the BIC. Our doors are open.

## **7. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 Room 115