

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

Date: Tuesday 11th of October 2011

Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Senate Room)

Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political representatives:

Chair – Steven Agnew MLA (Green Party), Anna Lo MLA (Alliance Party), Danny Kinahan MLA (UUP), Sarah Agnew (PA David McIlveen MLA DUP), David McIlveen MLA (DUP).

BME sector representatives:

James Holmlund (Bahai Council for NI), Justin Kouame (NICRAS), Helena Macormac (NICEM), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Ashok Sharma (Indian Community Centre), Joan McGovern (Barnardo's Tuar Ceatha), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Hanaa Ibrahim (Egyptian Society NI), Joseph Ricketts (ACSONI), Mohammad Elfaki (Sudanese Community Association NI), Eddis Nicholl (NICEM), Ayman Hassan (Sudanese Community Association NI), Asma Al Junaid (Sudanese Community Association NI), Anjela Nakazava (World Wide Women @ North Down), Kristyene Borelana (World Wide Women @ North Down), Wasif Naeem (NIMFA), M S Tareen (NIMFA), Mark Donahue (An Munia Tober), Eddis Nicholl (NICEM), Lilian Vellem (MCRC), Marie-Louise McAllister (An Munia Tober), Dr Mazhar Khan (Belfast Islamic Centre).

1. Apologies

Political representatives:

Sammy Douglas MLA (DUP), Colum Eastwood MLA (SDLP).

BME sector representatives:

Katy Radford (Belfast Jewish Community), 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), Ramesh Chada (Indian Community Centre), Alfred Abolarin (ACSONI).

2. Approval of the minutes of the last meeting

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

Immigration Seminar follow-up:

The feedback received after the seminar was very positive. Unfortunately Mike Golden, the Assistant Director of the UKBA was unable to attend due to transportation issues but the speakers from the various NGOs who intervened on the day are working together to draft a letter to Mike Golden highlighting the main issues discussed at the seminar. The draft letter should be ready next week and will be circulated to the group for comments. The secretariat will try to organise a follow-up seminar in January.

Steven thanked the secretariat for organising this event and said that the seminar had been very beneficial to highlight the disparities between policies and practices on the ground.

4. Representatives from the Department of Justice briefing on Race Hate Crime and Human Trafficking

Phillip Marshall, Detective Superintendent for the PSNI Organised Crime Branch and responsible for investigations on human exploitation, gave figures on organised crime in Northern Ireland.

In 13 months of investigation, there have been many successes in dismantling organised crime gangs.

In the year 2009-2010, 25 victims of trafficking were rescued. In 2010-2011, 23 victims were rescued. From April 2011 to now, there were already 22 victims rescued. This shows a steep rise in criminal activities. The victims rescued this year were from the UK, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Tanzania, Guinea and Zimbabwe.

On the first year of activity, many victims were Chinese nationals. Recently a Scottish gang trafficking people to Belfast has been dismantled.

It is impossible to quantify the amount of trafficking taking place but we can observe a worrying increase in the demand for sexual services.

The PSNI has been working in partnership and through the Organised Crime Taskforce, with the UKBA, the Gangmaster Licensing Agency, the Department of Health and other organisations.

The relationship with the Gardaí is essential as the land border is used by gangs for trafficking activities. Northern Ireland is a transition region for victims whose final destination is Dublin.

It is very difficult and can take years to dismantle networks. Prosecution is not the only way of dealing with the matter. Awareness campaigns, such as the Blue Blindfold campaign, are a way of accessing victims. Victims can also be accessed via campaigns in GP surgeries etc. Campaigns are also planned to discourage users of sexual services. The PSNI also have their own internal awareness campaigns for officers who could come across victims.

Media attention can be good but not always useful and salacious reporting by some newspapers has been very damaging.

Trafficking is an area of great concerns for the PSNI and further input from the BME groups would be very valuable.

Billy Stevenson, from the Department of Justice Organised Crime Branch, explained that the Department was keen to share information and resources. Trafficking is a difficult crime due to its underground and global nature.

People responses to crime can be very different and this is exacerbated by cultural differences. The department works closely with the Home Office and follows the Council of Europe's Directive on Human Trafficking. With Justice now devolved in Northern Ireland, we can work on whether a regional legislation is also required.

The department also works closely with the Gangmasters Licensing Authority on issues of labour trafficking (fishing, catering and building industries are particularly sensitive areas).

Billy stressed that the department are very keen to help representatives of the groups present today to raise awareness in their communities.

Eamon Jones, from the DoJ Community Safety Unit, reiterated that hate crime is a priority for the department and the minister.

There are two pieces of legislations that are used regarding hate crime. The Public Order 1997, protecting vulnerable groups and the Justice Order 2004 that requires courts to consider it an aggravating factor when hate motivates the crime.

A thematic review of hate crime was launched in 2008 and became the drive for improvement in the last years.

The Racial Equality Strategy, CSI and Community Safety Strategy strategic framework are in place for addressing hate crime, encouraging reporting and supporting victims.

The Community Safety Partnership is present in every local area with local action plans. The Belfast area also has a Tension Monitoring group that meet on a regular basis.

To review the effectiveness of those legislations, the CSP needs the views and feedback from the people and NGOs working on the ground.

Jeremy Adams, from the PSNI Community Safety Branch said that 31% of all hate crimes are racist. In South Belfast, racist hate crime reaches 4 times the average and in North Belfast it is twice the average. No areas of Northern Ireland are protected from racial attacks.

The enforcement side of the work is not sufficient. Minority Liaison officers are very active and the Unite Against Hate campaign has widely encouraged reporting. The PSNI has been working with a wide range of NGOs and is always happy to talk directly to communities.

Danny Kinahan asked if awareness could be raised directly from local councils.

Jeremy replied that each council have Good Relations officers. Some councils are more active than others though but the Community Safety Branch is available to help if there are any opportunities. The Unite Against Hate campaign has been a good tool to raise awareness.

The District Police Partnership and the Community Safety Partnership are planning a joint project to tackle hate crime in the new year.

Anna asked about trans-border partnership to target trafficking.

Phillip replied that the RoI and NI Departments of Justice are working together in their enforcement approach. Trainings have also been organised for detectives.

The PSNI are now looking at the Swedish model that places criminal responsibility on the user of sexual services.

Anna asked if the new EU Directive on Trafficking is going to be included into domestic law.

The Gangmasters Licensing Act is another piece of legislation that can improve the situation.

An Assembly Question is to be asked about trafficking this afternoon.

Steven asked if the people involved in organised crime have links with paramilitary organisations.

Phillip answered that the gangs the police has had to deal with were Scottish, Irish, Chinese and Eastern European. No paramilitary group per se have been involved although ex-paramilitary members have been involved in these criminal activities.

Steven also asked how much is racial hate crime treated differently from sectarian hate crime.

Jeremy answered that the investigation process for all types of hate crime are the same. The initiatives to address the issues are different. Many cultural events are taking place, trying to bring the communities together.

Steven asked if people responsible for committing one particular type of hate crime are also the ones committing the other one.

Jeremy replied that discrimination whatever forms it takes is the same.

Dr Khan talked about the issue of sexual services advertisement on Internet and if there is any possibility to block those sites.

Phillip answered that discussions on this issue have been going on with Internet service providers for a while now, especially with regards to child prostitution. The market has

changed from on street, where contacts had to be made directly between prostitutes and clients to off street, in hotel rooms and flats. Those services are now mostly advertised through Internet. The gangs now use the term “escort” as no legislation is currently attached to this term. A national UK working group is currently working on that issue. The difficulty is also that sites in foreign countries can also be advertising escort services in Belfast.

Justin Kouame explained that the lack of crime reporting from the African community is due to the very different nature of police services in Africa and in Northern Ireland. The police services in NI are very strong and people simply need reassurance, they need to have opportunities to interact directly with the police services. People don’t know their rights and as a result accept the unacceptable.

Jeremy replied that Minority Liaison Officers work with NGOs and communities on a regular basis. There are many NGOs doing a fantastic work.

Eamon reiterated the Community Safety Partnership’s will to get involved with groups at the local level.

Ayman Hassan asked if any support scheme is available for victims of racial hate crime.

Is there any coordination to raise awareness and understanding of the investigation process? People have difficulties understand investigations of those crimes, as they are often long and very complex. Is there also a way to avoid reoccurrence for victims of crime?

Jeremy answered it has been difficult to encourage reporting.

Regarding the investigation process, officers always try their best to explain to victims, who have access to interpreters 24/7 and are referred to other agencies for further help.

Regarding the reoccurrence of crimes, before officers go to any call, they check the history of the person so they already know if the victim has already been attacked previously on the same issue. PSNI can increase patrols in the area to avoid reoccurrence.

Patrick explained that from a BME point of view, we really need to work with the PSNI, attacks have to be reported as nothing can be done further without a police report. NICEM has conducted a research into the police services in 2006 and only half of the people interviewed were willing to report incidents to the police. NICEM’s new report in 2011 shows very similar figures. We need to make sure people are reporting crimes. Work has to be done at grassroots level and the majority community also needs to understand the consequences of repeated attacks on ethnic minority people.

Two new pieces of legislation have been created: the European Directive on Victims Rights and the Right to free assistance of an interpreter. Will the DoJ pass those two pieces of legislation?

5. Group Presentation

Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association:

The organisation is based in Belfast (7 Rugby Road) and gathers many families and 5 trustees. The objectives of the organisation are to promote Muslim culture and help Muslim families preserve their identity while integrating into the Northern Irish society.

NIMFA works on social, educational and religious projects. They provide a Saturday school for children, classes in Arabic studies and language, Islam studies, Urdu and English language classes. They organise dinners, barbecues, cookery classes and other social events. The organisation also provides support for members in hospital or in prison.

Prayers are held in the temple every week and marriages can take place in the temple. NIMFA works closely with the Belfast Islamic Centre and NICEM and with other Muslim groups throughout Northern Ireland.

6. AOB

The secretariat received a request from the Labour Party to join the All Party Group.

Steven stated that the All Party Group is an Assembly group; political parties have to be elected in the Assembly in order to attend, which is not currently the case for the Labour Party.

The Chair of the group will draft a response letter to the Labour Party and will circulate it to members for approval.

Eddis Nicholl informed the meeting that an interesting event on Human Trafficking will take place on Friday 14th of October in the Bar Library, Belfast from 16:00 to 18:00. The event is free and everybody's welcome.

7. Date of next meeting

8th of November 2011

12:00 for a 12.30 start, Room 29