

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

Date: Tuesday 13th April 2010
Venue: Parliament Buildings, Stormont (Room 279)
Time: 12:30pm

Attendees

Political Representatives:

Chair - Declan O'Loan MLA (SDLP), Billy Leonard MLA (Sinn Fein), Anna Lo MLA (Alliance Party), Dawn Purvis MLA (PUP), Steven Agnew (Green Party).

BME Sector Representatives:

Muhammad Al-Qaryooti (Belfast Islamic Centre), Chris McAfee (NICEM), Helena Macormac (NICEM), Patrick Yu (NICEM), Moira McCombe (NICRAS), James Holmlund, Claire Parris and Edwin Graham (Baha'i Community), Reggie Clark (ACSONI), Ashok Sharma (Indian Community Centre), Eileen Chan Hu (Chinese Welfare Association), Barry Fitzpatrick (NICEM), Sophie Romantzoff (NICEM), Hanaa Ibrahim (Egyptian Society), Roman Vilkovic (Czech and Slovak Association), Eddis Nicholl (NICEM), Margaret Donaghy (MCRC), Peter Gitari (ACSONI).

1. Apologies

Political Representatives:

Jim Shannon MLA (DUP), Stewart Finn (PUP).

BME Sector Representatives:

Ivy Ridge (Ballymena Inter-ethnic Forum), Katy Radford (Belfast Jewish Community), Frances and Phoebe Wong (World Wide Women @ North Down), Joan McGovern (Bernardos Tuar Ceatha), Derek Hanway (An Munia Tober), Javaid Naveed (NI Pakistani Cultural Association), Bobby Rao (Strabane Ethnic Community Association), Paul Yam (Wah Hep Chinese Association).

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

3. Matters arising from the last meeting

- Crisis fund motion update

The meeting heard that a date for the motion debate had been proposed for before the end of April but due to the general election campaign it was thought best to postpone the debate. Patrick Yu said during the election campaign general immigration issues may overshadow the crisis fund debate. Patrick and Chris informed the meeting the secretariat had met with the DUP and UUP to give them a briefing based on the papers prepared by the Law Centre (NI) and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. The meeting

heard the parties had not indicated they would be signing the motion. The meeting confirmed it was content for the motion debate to be delayed until following the general election.

- **Census 2011**

The meeting heard the presentation from Census Office due for this meeting was postponed. Dawn Purvis highlighted that the Census Office were due to give a presentation at the Committee for Finance and Personnel meeting tomorrow.

Patrick said he had raised concerns regarding the categories of ethnic groups that were to be used in the next census. Patrick highlighted the failure of communities to mobilise in the 2001 census and this contributed to the undercounting of ethnic minority communities. Anna Lo said it was unfair to say the communities had failed to mobilise themselves as they have limited resources and the Census Office has a role to play in engaging with these communities to promote participation. Edwin Graham said he felt there had been a failure to engage with communities during the process of consultation on the 2010 Census questionnaire. The meeting discussed issues regarding the census and agreed to raise these following the presentation from the Census Office representatives. Dawn said she would seek to raise some of these issues at the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting tomorrow.

- **Driving Licence Languages**

Chris McAfee updated the meeting on the availability of languages for driving licence theory tests highlighted at the March meeting of the APAG. Chris told the meeting Bobby Rao (Strabane Ethnic Community Association) had contacted his local MLA to see if other languages would be made available for the theory part of the driving test. Chris said if there were any further developments on this the APAG would be updated.

4. Committee on Standards and Privileges report on APAG Complaint

The meeting noted the publication of the report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges and copies were distributed to attendees. Billy Leonard informed the meeting he was on the Committee on Standards and Privileges and had participated in consideration of the complaint, as he was not a member of the APAG on Ethnic Minority Communities when the complaint was made. Billy said the comments made were viewed in the entire context of the whole interview. Declan told the meeting he was Chair of the Committee on Standards and Privileges but as he was a member of the APAG he took no part in the consideration of the complaint.

The meeting agreed to take no further action on the issue.

5. Polish NGOs study visit event

Chris informed the meeting a proposed event with Polish NGOs from across Europe to look at the work of the APAG had to be cancelled due to scheduling issues.

6. Group Presentations

- **Baha'i Community**

Presentation by James Holmlund and Claire Parris from the Baha'i Council Northern Ireland:

- The Baha'i community is one of the most recent world religions and the second most diffused religion in the world.
- The Baha'i Council Northern Ireland is a component of the international, national and local/regional levels of operation of the Baha'i community. The Baha'i International Community is represented in the United Nations.
- There are approximately 300-350 people in Baha'i community in Northern Ireland.
- The Baha'i community has been present in Northern Ireland since the turn of the 20th century with first recorded family living in Waringstown.
- The Baha'i community mainly live in the Greater Belfast area but also in other areas.
- Baha'i is a minority faith in Northern Ireland rather than an ethnic minority religion.

The central themes of the Baha'i beliefs:

- All major themes relate to the belief in one God from whom all religions are derived. The purpose of Baha'i religion is promoting unity and bringing people together.
- The four core activities of Baha'i faith are devotional meetings and prayers, children's classes, youth groups and courses and study circles. These core activities are at the grassroots of the religion across the world.

Jim told the meeting the founding papers of the Baha'i faith can be found at www.bahai.org. Ashok Sharma asked what language is used for the Baha'i texts and Claire said they were originally in Arabic and Farsi but has now been translated into hundreds of languages. Declan asked what were the central teaching authority of the Baha'i faith and Edwin Graham informed the meeting that all Baha'i bodies are elected and the central authority is the Universal House of Justice which is based in Haifa, Israel.

7. AOB

- Membership of APAG

Billy Leonard told the meeting of a request by SEEDS group in Derry to attend the today's APAG meeting. Dawn Purvis said that the protocol by which the group had received the invitation to the meeting had been incorrect and any invitation should only come from the chair of the APAG. Dawn said that more

information would be required about SEEDS to see if it met the terms of reference for the APAG.

Billy said he had no issue about the protocol that should have been followed when inviting a group. Margaret Donaghy said that SEEDS carry out equality training and are an umbrella organisation for groups in the Derry area.

Patrick told the meeting the APAG was originally created for ethnic minority people to have direct dialogue with political representatives and the terms of reference of the APAG were drawn up from this. Eileen Chan Hu asked if the terms of reference would mean that only groups representing single identity would be admitted.

Declan said the terms of reference are closely defined and there is a need to be attentive to this but what is required is a process of how people become a member of this group. Declan suggested a draft process of membership with terms of reference was drawn by the office bearers and the secretariat which could then be agreed by the APAG. Billy said that would be a good exercise but could SEEDS perhaps make a presentation in the meantime to the APAG. The meeting noted there are already current members of the APAG who have yet to present and Declan said he was concerned any presentation made by SEEDS would be seen as an admission interview. Dawn suggested SEEDS could make a written submission on their work to the APAG.

Patrick said the new terms of reference and process for membership would be applied to both new and existing members of the APAG.

- Human Trafficking

Eileen told the meeting she had a met with the PSNI to discuss the issue of human trafficking. Eileen highlighted the cases of Chinese and Russian women who have gone missing from systems. Eileen told the meeting that Women's Aid dealt with cases of human trafficking of women and children but not men. Eileen said the issue of human trafficking was one that should be looked at with the utmost importance.

Margaret highlighted to the meeting that the MCRC works with cases of male and labour trafficking in partnership with the Migrants Helpline. Margaret said the MCRC works with the serious crime unit of the PSNI and the MCRC hopes to meet with Women's Aid.

The meeting discussed difficulties with current systems regarding human trafficking and Moira McCombe highlighted the emphasis on convictions means people who are trafficked are reluctant to come forward and there is a need for anonymous support. Eileen also noted concerns about unaccompanied minors disappearing from the system and how loose the current system is.

Patrick highlighted the APAG sponsored conference on human trafficking in the Long Gallery last year and subsequent questions in the Northern Ireland

Assembly and asked what is the best way for this group to take the issue forward. Patrick said the legal issues involved mean it goes beyond the capacity of the APAG and suggested the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission could give the group information on this issue.

The meeting agreed to invite the NI Human Rights Commission and Steven Agnew said this would give us a chance to follow up on specific issues and Billy said the group can focus on specific shortcomings of the current system.

- Festival of India

Ashok Sharma distributed copies of the information on the Festival of India that will take place at St George's Market in Belfast on 18th April.

- Networking event for those working race and ethnicity

Eileen told the meeting a networking event for those working race and ethnicity was held on 25th March, attended by approximately 130 groups. Eileen said a report was being prepared on the basis of this event and it was agreed it would be distributed to the members of the APAG when ready.

8. Date of the next meeting

Tuesday, 11th May 2010, 12pm for 12:30 start (lunch to be provided) Venue: Room 144, Parliament Buildings, Stormont