

## *International Migrants' Day 2012 - Event Summary*

### **Meeting of the Parliament - Members Business Debate on motion S4M-04857 International Migrants' Day 18 December 2012**

International Migrants' Day was celebrated by Migrants' Rights Scotland at Scottish Parliament. The event was preceded by a Members Debate, which had been put forward by Christina McKelvie MSP, on motion S4M-04857 'International Migrant's Day'. A group of approximately 20 Members of Scottish Parliament remained for the debate. Many contributed to the debate to make note of the contribution that migrants had made in their constituencies and to support the proposal that a Migrants Conference be arranged in the future to hear evidence from migrants in Scotland in the hope that it would inform future approaches by the Scottish Government to the UK Government. Around 20 members of the public were present in the Gallery to listen to the Debate, representing interests from community and migrants organisations, as well as those directly affected by recent changes in family migration policy.

Sandra White MSP (Glasgow Kelvin – SNP) reflected on the United Nations "International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families", and noted the positive contribution that migrants make to Scottish society, not just economically, but culturally also. She said that the recognition of the contribution of migrants is important, especially in the context of xenophobic rhetoric in the media and the hard-line attitude of some politicians towards migrant workers. She commended the work of Migrants' Rights Scotland for supporting migrants and migrant community organisations in Scotland. Nonetheless, she noted the detrimental impact of current migration policy on migrants, some of which are long-term British citizens. She asked the Minister to consider setting up a Migrants Conference to hear evidence from migrants in Scotland in the hope that it would inform future approaches by the Scottish Government to the UK Government.

Helen Eadie MSP (Cowdenbeath – Labour) discussed her involvement with Eastern European migrants, and celebrated the contribution of migrants to Scottish life, whilst also noting the need to challenge xenophobic rhetoric. She advocated adopting a human rights approach to migration governance, both nationally and globally. She also supported Sandra White's call from a Migrants Conference in Scotland.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland – SNP) emphasised the need for politicians and commentators to stop using the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’ in a pejorative way – ‘immigration’ is not a dirty word and this type of rhetoric is dangerous, and leads to scapegoating of migrant communities. He said that we must remember that migration is the key to Scotland’s future, and can challenge the demographic problems that Scotland will most likely face in the future. He noted that because of these challenges, Scotland needs migration and current UK migration policy does not address Scotland’s differential needs. He expressed his belief that immigration is fundamentally a good thing, economics aside, due to the diverse experiences it brings to Scottish communities.

Annabel Goldie MSP (West Scotland - Conservative) brought attention to current Scottish demographics, noting that for the first time there are more pensioners than young people in Scotland. As such, the migrant population is important to the Scottish economy. However, there is a lack of reliable data relating to what extent Scotland depends on the migrant workforce. She also noted the negative public perception of migration in Scotland. These myths need to be dispelled in order to educate the public on the value of migrant communities to the Scottish economy. She pointed to the lack of knowledge amongst many migrants of their legal and civic rights and entitlements, as well the exploitation that many migrants are experiencing in terms of their employment rights. She emphasised the need for more robust data about Scottish migration.

Stewart Stevenson MSP (Banffshire and Buchan Coast – SNP) reflected on the positive contribution that family migration can have on local communities; it encourages stability and integration of migrants into Scottish society. He also noted the contribution that Poles have made in his constituency, particularly in helping create a stable dentistry system.

Anne McTaggart MSP (Glasgow - Labour) celebrated the contribution that migrants make to Scotland’s social and cultural identity, reflecting on the historical migration of the Irish to Glasgow. Parallels can be drawn between Irish immigration in previous generations and the recent arrival of eastern European people. She reflected on her work with the cross-party group on Poland, which allows her to understand more clearly the issues that migrants in Scotland may face, as well as being involved in the coordination of cultural events that break down barriers in communities. She expressed her belief that through community activism and engagement, racial and ethnic discrimination can be challenged, which can lead to changing public perception on the importance of immigration and cultural diversity to Scotland.

Humza Yousaf, the Minister for External Affairs and International Development, drew attention to the importance of recognising International Migrants’ Day as the fundamental rights of migrants and their families are important, not only to migrants

but to all in Parliament. He said that marginalisation and exclusion from participation in society can only have negative results. He emphasised the need to see immigration as a positive force and not the negative, dirty word it has become. He also reflected on the benefits that Scottish universities and colleges gain from foreign students. He said that Scottish ministers want an immigration policy that reflects Scottish values of openness, quality, and fairness. Immigration policy should reflect the importance of family life to migrants’ stability and integration, as well as allowing them their basic human right to family life. The Minister argued that independence will allow Scotland to implement policies based on its own needs and welcomed the suggestion that a migrants conference or some other means of gathering evidence be established. He concluded by saying that Scotland welcomes hard-working people and their families who want to live and work here.

### **International Migrant’s Day Celebrations Scottish Parliament**

Around 50 people attended the event following the Members Debate, which was organised by Migrants’ Rights Scotland and attended by MSPs, representatives from national strategic partners in the BME sector, regional organisations, migrant groups, and universities as well as those directly affected by the recent changes in family migration policy.

The event was opened by Pat Elsmie, Director of Migrants’ Rights Scotland, who thanked everyone for attending and reflected on the contributions that migrants make to Scottish society.

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development Humza Yousaf, then welcomed all attendees and, reflecting on his own experience as the son of migrants, he discussed the numerous contributions that migrants make to Scottish society, economically, socially and culturally. He said that Scottish ministers want an immigration policy that reflects Scottish values of openness, quality, and fairness. The Minister highlighted that an independent Scotland would be able to implement policies based on its own needs, which are very different from the rest of the UK. He also said that he was happy to explore the establishment of a migrants’ conference to help inform an evidence-based future approach by the Scottish Government to immigration policy.

The Minister’s welcome was followed by a short presentation which asked attendees to reflect on the theme ‘Who is a migrant’. This visual presentation explored the multi-faceted nature of migration by exploring the different kinds of migrants, from

migrating geese to the refugee woman to the foreign student. The Migrant Manifesto was then performed by artists Tawona Sithole and Gameli Tordzro, ending with the reflective line 'dignity has no nationality'.

Following the presentation and performance, a number of representatives from migrant families who have been adversely affected by the recent changes in family migration policy told their stories. This was a very poignant part of the event, highlighting the impacts of hardened attitudes towards migration. British citizen Yana told her story about her attempts to take care of her widowed mother who lives in Russia. Under current migration policy, Yana's mother cannot join her only child who lives in Scotland, denying Yana and her mother of their basic human right to family life. Les and Becky spoke about their difficulty in securing a visa for Becky who has just completed a PhD in the UK. As it stands, Becky will have to return to American one day after the couple's first wedding anniversary. Other stories put forward by the audience highlighted the extreme and vulnerable situations that many migrants now find themselves in as a result of these rule changes.

Whilst the issues discussed during the event continue to cause serious issues for many people, the fact that our elected representatives in Scotland reflected on the significant contribution that migrants continue to make to Scottish society is an important step. MSPs also witnessed the shattering impacts this is having on real individuals and their families. Furthermore, the cross-party support demonstrates the support that our campaign continues to build on. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. If you or anyone you know has been affected by these changes in migration policy, please get in touch so we can continue to build our portfolio of cases as part of our campaign for peoples' right to family life to be respected, protected and fulfilled.

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