

Cross-Party Group on Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice

Tuesday 13th December at 6pm on zoom

Present

Anas Sarwar MSP (Chair)

Non-MSP Group Members

Sabah Aslam	Interfaith Glasgow
Ephraim Borowski	SCOJEC
Alessandra Cecolin	University of Aberdeen
Farah Farzana	CEMVO Scotland and Al Masaar SCIO
Faten Hameed	Scottish Iraqi Association
Peter Hopkins	Newcastle University (Secretary)
Rabia Ihsan	
Vanessa Mabonso Nzolo	Aberdeen University Students Association - NUS Scotland
Jacqueline Merchant	Scottish Parliament
Mo Razzaq	South Lanarkshire Council
Kirsty Robson	SCoJeC
Mateo Urquijo	allpay Ltd
David Scott	Nil by Mouth
Susan Siegel	Interfaith Scotland
Aneel Singh Bhopal	West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC)
Kash Taank	Glasgow Life
Linsay Taylor	MEND
Kimberley Wong	CRER

Apologies

Naseem Anwar

Welcome

Most focus on Islamophobia but expanded focus this year on different forms of racial and religious prejudice.

Previous minutes

The previous minutes were approved; this was proposed by Linsay Taylor and seconded by Ephraim Borowski.

Presentation from Nil by Mouth

Dave Scott presented about the work of Nil Mouth

- Nil by Mouth have been working for 22 years of work now in schools, workplaces, sport, the criminal justice system and on policy matters
- Contributed to formation of the 2003 religious aggravation legislation.

- 2010-2018 – 5348 arrests for religious aggravation with Anti-Catholic offences totalling 2,994 and Anti-Protestant offences totalling 1,599.
- Sectarianism as a contested idea and something that people have quite diverse and strong views on.
- Some feel it is discussed too much and overstated in modern society and others feel it is not discussed nearly enough. Others feel that it should be treated as individual identity issues as opposed to under the term ‘sectarian.’
- Tends to be associated with the West of Scotland, football and the historic tensions between Catholics and Protestants dating back from the Reformation.
- Sectarianism as a term applies to diverse forms of religion and not only to Christianity but Nil by Mouth only focuses on inter-Christian sectarianism. Act as a ‘signpost’ to those contacting it on other issues.
- Statistically, 1 in 3 people in Scotland are Protestant and 16% are Catholic (2011 census) – waiting on next census. 32% Church of Scotland and 16% Catholic affiliation but religious attendance for all religions is estimated as fewer than 5%.
- Although attendance at places of worship might be low, the labels of religious affiliation still matter. It’s still part of individuals and communities stories and sense of identity.
- Important to consider identity labels and how these are viewed both positively and negatively.
- Traditional understandings of sectarianism are mutating and seeping into something quite different to what it used to be, including politics, sport, and cultural issues The issue of politics and the political dynamics that connect the U.K. and Ireland need to be considered, especially regarding constitutional changes.
- Status anxiety: it can be documented that there is now more parity between traditions on lots of issues, but older tensions, prejudices and resentments linger.
- Considerable tensions in recent years over parades after 2018 when a priest was attacked in the east end of Glasgow and in 2019 after serious disturbances at a procession in Govan. There is currently an Advisory Group in parades looking into how this situation can be improved.
- This issue can be a cocktail: Passion (your belief in a specific religion, faith), Pantomime: (e.g. the concept that sectarian abuse can be dismissed as ‘banter’ or viewed as acceptable behaviour in certain settings) and the Poison (people who use identity issues as an outlet for their own hatred). Not everyone defines each of these in the same way.
- Challenge around how to work within a human rights framework in Scotland. Challenges around the definition of the term and what it means – what is racial and what is religious? Unlikely to ever have sectarianism properly defined in law.

Questions and discussion

- Has there been a generational shift in attitudes when it comes to these issues? Are they less tolerant and less willing to accept these divisions?
- Anti-Catholicism is the biggest part of the issue but there are other issues too as evidenced by arrests stats provided earlier.
- Presence of the issue in everyday life provides evidence that it exists. To see sectarianism simply as ‘football, stabbings and violence’ misunderstands much of the problem in Scotland where these attitudes can be found in workplaces, homes and communities. Attitudes are more prevalent than violence. Can measure crime, but how do we measure the jobs people don’t get, the relationships that hit a full stop because of

family/community prejudice or the emotional impact of incidents on those targeted? Number of employment tribunals support the view that these harmful attitudes are brought into workplaces.

- Social media makes it easy for people to make remarks, comments, and points about sectarianism. It's provided a new battleground where those who are invested in these types of behaviour have access to others 24 hours a day. There are those that use social media sites to amplify misinformation or a jaundiced point of view. Those who try to resolve situations constructively often targeted by large numbers of accounts and individuals seek to gain influence online by promoting fixed points of view.
- Some are hostile to the term sectarianism and prefer to use other terminology such as anti-Irish/British bigotry or anti-Irish racism. Whilst it may be understandable that people who identify as an ethnic/religious grouping are more concerned and interested in how prejudice impacts upon them. Important we understand that not all Irish people are Catholic or British people Protestant. Whilst faith groups have formal structures and designated leaders there is a diversity of views and perspectives within religious and ethnic groups and we shouldn't assume agreed positions or points of view.
- Some are suspicious that there is a 'sectarianism industry' and there is funding and work generated because of it. However, less than a dozen full time staff work on anti-sectarian projects across Scotland.
- Racism is part of the issue, but it is also political.
- Importance of listening to people's lived experiences. NbM listen to hundreds of these every year.
- Sense in which people of faith (any faith) are under attack and are a source of humour and can be dismissed in an increasingly secular age.
- Visual aspects of prejudice such as symbols, dress but also accent.
- Visibility and how diverse forms of this leads to racial and religious prejudice.
- Sense in which sectarianism was a national priority for a while but where does it stand now? What action is needed? Funding and support for initiatives. Work around marches and parades, and the issues this generates. Issues around hate crime and human rights (and the extent to which this includes the issues discussed here), role of local authorities in helping to address these issues.
- Challenge of some people being aggressively secular and openly hostile to those who hold religious points of views.
- Role of religious education in challenging stereotypes. Importance of accepting choice in the Education system and helping children who go to different schools understand why these choices are made. Bringing children from different faith & beliefs together on a regular basis to reinforce the benefits of diversity and constructively challenge any misconceptions or prejudice as early as possible.
- Scotland is not as tolerant and as diverse as those who live here often think it is. 1 in 20 in Scotland are ethnic minorities compared to 1 in 5 in England. What can we learn from England as Scotland starts to become more diverse?

AOCB

No further issues were raised.

Next meeting is Tuesday 28th February at 6pm on zoom.