

# Building a Welcoming Community

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## Lordorice and Imelda Djouontso

Friends of Lordorice have been campaigning against her deportation to Cameroon following the failure of her claim for asylum. There are fears for her safety and that of her baby if they are forced to go back to a country that has a poor human rights record. Although she has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, she was detained for several weeks in a removal centre in England with her baby Imelda. Lordorice has made friends locally through her church, and her volunteering with organisations such as Corrymeela, the Mornington Project in South Belfast and NICRAS (the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers). Her supporters gathered at Belfast City Hall on 22 May, in a last-ditch attempt to avert the deportation. Since then she was granted bail and returned to Belfast where the campaign continued, with politicians, including Martin McGuinness, the Deputy First Minister, speaking out on her behalf. The Home Secretary reconsidered the case and granted her Discretionary Leave to Remain.

For details about Lordorice's case and campaign see:

<http://www.ncadc.org.uk/archives/filed%20newszines/newszine82/lodorice.html>

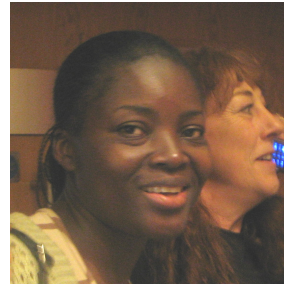


Suzan McEwen of Corrymeela speaks at the City Hall rally on behalf of Lordorice and Imelda. © M McNulty

## New edition of *Forced to Flee* is Launched

Recent changes in legislation and Home Office practice here have created a need for a new, fully revised 3rd edition of *Forced to Flee: Frequently Asked Questions about Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland*. This valuable guide is published by the Refugee Action Group against a background of disquiet over the Home Office's new arrangements for the removal and detention in GB of some asylum seekers, and concerns about increased instances of racism. It is endorsed by the National Union of Journalists locally, and distributed to all its members. Previous editions have helped to ensure that local reporting of asylum issues has been based largely on reality, not myth. (*Forced to Flee* is available free from EMBRACE.)

## Campaigning Works!



Lordorice Djouontso just seconds after hearing the good news that she has been granted 3 years leave to remain in this country. She is pictured with Moira McCombe of NICRAS.

© M McNulty

## The Shadow of Slavery

Keynote speaker at the EMBRACE AGM (see p.4) was Arlington Trotman, Moderator of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe. He said that African descendants are always aware that skin colour is at the heart of the matter. Africans were deemed to be inferior and European enslavers superior. This was used to justify the horrific slave trade, and was reinforced by Enlightenment thinkers. The slave trade was economic and made huge wealth for Britain and Europe, all at the expense of enslaved Africans traded in America and the Caribbean. Even Christian themes were used to justify enslavement: One of Sir John Hawkins' slave ships commanded by Francis Drake and owned by Queen Elizabeth was ironically called *The Grace of God*.

Today, some 10.5 million people exist in various forms of slavery, including bonded labour and sex exploitation (40,000 women trafficked into Germany for World Cup 2006). The systematic extraction of mineral resources from Africa and Asia over the centuries has contributed to abject poverty in those continents, and deep mental slavery. The Bible challenges dehumanisation but proclaims the oneness of the human family. We have to strive together confirm equality of all human beings, and to reunite humanity socially, economically and politically.

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Never, never will we desist, until we have wiped away this scandal from the Christian name, released ourselves from the load of guilt, under which we at present labour, and extinguished every trace of this bloody traffic.'

William Wilberforce, speaking in Parliament in 1791, when his motion to abolish slavery failed.

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## Immigration Enforcement

### RAG Seminar

On 2 May the Refugee Action Group held a seminar to explore the situation regarding the new Belfast Immigration Enforcement Unit and the transfer of people apprehended here to removal centres in GB. Fears were expressed about the possible lack of appropriate legal advice, people being isolated from their support networks and an apparent lack of adequate training for police who work alongside immigration officials. The visible presence of police in immigration raids on private dwellings is heightening community fears about foreign terrorism. Raids in workplaces create concern that there is widespread illegal working. A considerable number of those arrested are subsequently released. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) is currently researching the immigration enforcement procedures but finding it difficult to access information.

### Criticism by Chief Inspector of Prisons

Meanwhile, also in May 2007, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, criticised the fact that asylum seekers are often held overnight in poorly "equipped police cells in Belfast" prior to removal to Scotland. She also expressed concern about the use of handcuffs and the fact that people were not always given access to proper legal advice. For more information see [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/6660085.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6660085.stm)

## Down and Out in Belfast

On 22 June, Amnesty International chose St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast as part of a national sleep-out event to express solidarity with people who become destitute when their asylum claims fail. In November 2006, Amnesty launched its *Down and Out* report highlighting how the UK government policy on refused asylum applicants forces many of them into abject poverty in an attempt to drive them out of the country. Earlier this year, Amnesty teamed up with refugee, migrant and church organisations to launch Still Human Still Here, the campaign to end destitution among refused asylum seekers [www.amnesty.org.uk/ni](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/ni)

### 'The World's Worst Bigots'?

A Human Beliefs and Values Survey was carried out recently by the University of Ulster in 19 European countries as well as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA. It revealed that Northern Ireland has the highest number of people (44%) admitting that they would not want someone from one of the following identities living beside them: people from another race, immigrants or foreign workers, Muslims, Jews or homosexuals. (*Belfast Telegraph* 7/02/07.)

## Volunteering Opportunities

### Red Cross Orientation Scheme

When people apply for asylum here the Red Cross allocates people to assist them. The trained volunteers work in pairs. First they meet the asylum applicant to assess their needs. They then help with everyday activities such as filling in forms, finding a doctor, or a school. There are vouchers to buy clothes or household items at Red Cross shops. The volunteers have an involvement with the people whose asylum claims are being assessed for about 6 weeks while they find their feet. To find out more phone 028 9024 6400 or email [amcalpine@redcross.org.uk](mailto:amcalpine@redcross.org.uk).

### NICRAS

At its recent AGM, NICRAS was renamed the **Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers**.

Its volunteer programme finds placements for asylum applicants and refugees within NICRAS and in other organisations. However, it is also possible for supporters to join NICRAS or to volunteer with the group. Their current projects/activities for the refugee community include: accessing educational funding; advice for refugees; awareness raising; cultural and social events; the Thursday lunchtime drop in; networking and campaigning; Refugee Week events; social events; summer activities; and support for detainees. For more information call Ronald Vellem or Moira McCombe on 028 9024 6699, email [nicras@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nicras@hotmail.co.uk), or visit the NICRAS website: [www.nicras.org.uk](http://www.nicras.org.uk)

NICRAS held a successful seminar on contemporary slavery during Refugee Week.

### Correction

In the item on the NI Committee for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in our last newsletter we were a little hasty in giving you their new phone number which is now in use as their fax number. Please note that the correct phone number is 028 9024 6699.

## News from the South

### International Chaplain Appointed

Rev. Obinna, Ulogwara from Lagos in Nigeria, has been appointed C of I Diocesan Chaplain to the international community in Dublin. *C of I Gazette* 2 March 2007.

### Who's Who?

The Refugee and Migrant Project Irish Bishop's Conference are to be congratulated on the publication of the leaflet, *Who's Who: People Seeking Asylum, Refugees, Migrants*. The clear information with definitions, explanations and statistics relating to the Irish Republic should help to debunk a lot of myths. For information on obtaining copies email: [refproject@iecon.ie](mailto:refproject@iecon.ie)

## CHURCH NEWS

### Focus on the Methodist Church

Methodists have a proud history of social action. The pages of recent editions of the *Methodist Newsletter* reveal how they are involved in welcoming newcomers today, often through language classes:

#### The Moy, Co. Tyrone

Church people were aware of growing numbers of migrant workers largely from Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, so a leaflet advertising English classes was distributed in the Moy and Blackwatertown. This brought in over 50 people at first, although numbers later reduced. Local preacher, Jana McKenzie, is originally from the Czech Republic, where she taught English as a foreign language. Her skill and enthusiasm have contributed greatly to the success of the classes. Other church people help with conversation group work. A social element has been added by games based on learning English and there has been a day out to the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum.

#### 'English Plus' at Trinity, Lisburn

In Trinity church they prayed about how to answer the challenge of the many people from other countries who may be lonely or bewildered because of lack of confidence in speaking English. Their prayers were answered when they found a gifted teacher, qualified to teach English as a foreign language. Debbie Warke has been leading a team of volunteers from the congregation, circuit and the neighbourhood, who help with the classes, the tea and the crèche for the afternoon sessions.

#### Partnership with local FE Colleges

Both in the Moy and Lisburn there is co-operation with the local further education colleges, Tyrone College and the Upper Bann Institute. If your congregation is hoping to host a language class have a word with your local FE college who may be able to help with the teaching.

#### English Classes at Glastry in the Ards

Talk about running language classes turned to action following an organised attack on 3 women in the area. Rev. Steven Foster, writes:

"If you were to measure success on a purely academic front the classes may not appear to have been too successful. But it's relationships that define the success of these classes ... Lonely young Polish mothers now have loving Christian friends that they can rely on, and access to services they did not know about before. Lithuanians have caring friends whom they can call upon for help, and a church to welcome them."

*Methodist Newsletter, April 2007.*

Glastry manse has also been the focus of help for Lithuanian people who had been subject to harassment, and a migrant worker's car has been housed in the manse garage to prevent further damage.

#### Juliet Turner Supports Trafficked Women

Proceeds of around £1000 from the sale of CDs and other merchandise at the singer's performance in the Waterfront Hall, Belfast, on International Freedom Day, 25 March, 2007 were donated to the Poppy Project in the UK. This charity is for the provision of safe accommodation for women who have been trafficked. For more information see [www.thetruthisn'tsexy.com](http://www.thetruthisn'tsexy.com)

Juliet Turner's home church was Togherdoo Methodist Church near Omagh.

#### Dublin Visit for Theological Students

Students from Edgehill Theological College visited Dublin to explore ministry in a multicultural society.

#### Methodist Numbers Increase

The Irish census in 2006 shows that Methodist numbers have increased by 21% since 2002. 5612 of the total were born in other countries and 5077 in Ireland.

Sources: *Methodist Newsletter*, January, April, May and June 2007.

#### Taste and See Worship Event

On 19 May the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism held an inter-denominational event at St. Colmcille's Church in Ballyhackamore, Belfast, reflecting a variety of worship styles new to the island of Ireland. The morning workshops included:

Psalm Drummers: Drums and Percussion in Worship and as Intercession. Simon Edwards

<http://www.psalmdrummers.com>

Hand in Glove: Puppetry as a Tool for Storytelling around Racism and Sectarianism. Yvonne Naylor

<http://www.puppetwoman.org>

A Bridge Over Troubled Water: Gospel Music as a Tool for Reconciliation. Philip McKinley

<http://www.hardgospel.net>

His Wonders to Perform: The Creative Arts as a Healing Tool. Claudette Douglas

<http://www.ctbi.org.uk/index.php>

Expressing Worship through Creative Arts (painting, sketching, clay, banner making). Adelyn Carr

[adelyncarr@hotmail.com](mailto:adelyncarr@hotmail.com)

The afternoon worship included some of these elements as well as music from the Polish Mission Church, Lisburn, the Belfast City Vineyard; and prayer and poetry in English, French and Spanish.



## EMBRACE News

### Stormont Reception

On 9 May, the day after the reestablishment of the NI Executive, the First and Deputy First Ministers invited minority ethnic people to a reception at Stormont along with support organisations. Members of the EMBRACE committee were among those who attended. The event was intended to show the world that the shared future planned under the new administration includes a welcome for minority ethnic people and those who are coming here from other countries.



Fr Paul Turley of EMBRACE (right), shares a joke with the First Minister at the Stormont reception. © Harrison Photography

### AGM on 22 May at Edgehill College

EMBRACE members met to hear keynote speaker Arlington Trotman reflect about freedom in the 21st century, against the backdrop of the bicentenary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. (See p.1.)

### Chairperson's Report

In his annual report, outgoing chairperson Richard Kerr drew attention to the fact that immigration was managed purely for economic gain, how the tightening of policies was linked with security issues and how the shake up in the Home Office had linked together crime, terrorism and immigration. He had recently met the head of the new Belfast Immigration Enforcement Unit and found that over 100 people were being taken to removal centres in GB each month, of which around 50% are deported. These trends raised human rights issues and consideration of whether we might deal with some of these issues differently under devolution, as Scotland had already chosen to do.

While it had not proved possible to access funding for a full time development officer, EMBRACE has been grateful to receive grants from the following bodies:

Churches' Commission for Racial Justice of Churches  
Together in Britain and Ireland  
Lloyds TSB  
Priorities Fund of the Church of Ireland.

### EMBRACE on the Street

Conor Mullholland gave a report on the progress made with this project and the useful contribution made by the churches involved in the pilot.

### Committee

The following people were re-elected to the committee: Scott Boldt, Paddy Donnelly, Tim Foley, Billy Kane, Richard Kerr, Margaret McNulty, Paul Turley, John Wonnacott and Denise Wright. There are 2 new members. Eileen McKillen is a Sister of Adoration with a ministry to the homeless, currently working with homeless men in Belfast and Yvonne Naylor has worked with the Irish School of Ecumenics and Corrymeela in producing resources for tackling racism and sectarianism.

Following the AGM, the committee met briefly and paid tribute to the work of outgoing Chairperson, Richard Kerr, and Scott Boldt was elected as his successor. Denise Wright was elected Secretary and Paul Turley, Treasurer.

### Resources

The AGM saw the launch of the latest information update *Embracing Diversity*, 2007. It gives an introduction to the complex issues of immigration, asylum and racism as well as ideas as to how Christians can help to make this a more welcoming community. Along with other EMBRACE publications, it is in pdf form on the web site and is available free on request from the EMBRACE office.

Don't forget our CD *Once We Were Strangers*, with its biblical and other resources and first hand accounts of their experiences here from migrants and refugees. A donation of around £5.00 would help to defray expenses.

### Racial Justice Sunday

Racial Justice Sunday is 9 September 2007 Please contact the Refugee and Migrant Project immediately if you want to order a RJS pack: E-mail [refproject@iecon.ie](mailto:refproject@iecon.ie) (This will also be Hard Gospel Sunday in the C of I)

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"After all, what makes any event important, unless by its observation we become better and wiser, and learn 'to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly before God'?"

Olaudah Equiano, the African, former slave, anti-slavery campaigner and Methodist evangelist who visited Ireland in 1791.

[www.setallfree.net](http://www.setallfree.net)

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