

From: Pauline Bleach
Sent: Friday, 29 June 2007 7:33 PM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007

As someone who came to Australia as an English speaker and white, professional, no headscarves in sight, all the things so dearly valued by the current Australian Government, I cannot but compare myself to another who immigrated to my country Ireland at the same time, to my home town Portlaoise, in fact.

His story

Mr Adebari (43), who fled his home country because of religious persecution seven years ago, was elected to the Town Council in 2004. He was elected first citizen yesterday under a mayoral pact between Fine Gael, Sinn Fein and Independent members of the nine-member council.

In the seven years, he's been in Portlaoise he has achieved so much starting from nothing.

Mr Adebari works for Laois County Council coordinating an integration project for local immigrants. He also presents a radio show and runs a consultancy providing training in cross-cultural awareness.

If he was in Australia and on a Bridging Visa Es, he would still be moving from charity to charity getting bus tokens and food vouchers to feed his family.

Even if they eventually return home to a safer country, is it not better for all that government policy allows them to create value during their stay?

As my friend Bernie once said. Why are we turning away the best dry land farmers in the world? Most Afghan asylums seekers now provide a very important rural function in our society.

Yet with all my education and privileges I have, in the 10 years I was in Australia I've written a few letters, attended a few marches.

I think Ireland got a much better deal, don't you?

Be careful how you choose your immigrants, you may be losing a Mr Adebari.

Ireland has the same problems with fear and racial issues as any other country. It chose not to exploit that for political gain, preferring a united Irish society above a few votes.

Perhaps it is more important to create the social situation that allows immigrants and asylum seekers to achieve and create value for their new society, that allows them to belong.

Perhaps it is not the immigrants but government policy that needs a test.

Do our policies aid our immigrants and asylum seekers to integrate and think proudly of Australia as home?

Reference:

<http://www.independent.ie/national-news/history-is-made-as-town-elects-first-black-mayor-890903.html>

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