

# **REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE ISOLATED, SAYS DORAS LUIMNÍ**

*Limerick, IRELAND, Monday 11th June 07*

A Limerick-based support organisation for refugees and asylum seekers today called for greater efforts to be made in establishing direct relationships between asylum seekers and refugees and their local communities.

Doras Luimní said that refugees and asylum seekers were increasingly suffering from alienation and depression because of minimal integration with the local people of Limerick and surrounding areas.

According to Geraldine Dollard of Doras Luimní, *"Some people view asylum seekers and refugees as unfortunate guests who will eventually return to their own country. This belief motivates peoples' initial willingness to accommodate them within the local community, but also explains why they do not easily become integrated into local communities."*

*"In Limerick, we meet asylum seekers who have been waiting an average of three years for a decision on their application for refugee status. Some are known to wait up to seven years. Accommodated in hostels in Meelick in Clare, Limerick City and Foynes in County Limerick, their legal status in Ireland is uncertain while they await a decision on their status. During that time they must survive on EUR19 a week and they are not allowed to work. Coupled with the lack of any real contact with their local communities, many face isolation and depression. Likewise, refugees struggling to secure employment find themselves alienated from local community life", stated Ms. Dollard.*

Ms. Dollard stated that there are social and economic benefits associated with increased local integration.

She explained, *"Increased acceptance by communities enables refugees to seek employment and contribute to the local economy. Likewise, the increased integration of asylum seekers into local life will improve their experience of this country and allows them to share with us their diverse cultures and traditions."*

Nigerian-native Jumoke Oyewo, who is living in Ireland since 2001 and has been a refugee for the last four years, indicated that the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into Irish life was dependant on the willingness of all sectors of Irish society.

*"The country's politicians and Government Agencies have as much a part to play as local communities in enhancing relationships with refugees and asylum seekers. Key decision-makers at local and national level can provide leadership and set the tone in public debate on the successful integration of refugees, therefore contributing to the development of a more tolerant and inclusive society", stated Ms. Oyewo.*

To highlight the importance of developing and fostering relationships between asylum seekers, refugees and local communities, Doras Luimní will hold an open public event at the University of Limerick on Saturday 23rd June 2007.

The second annual 'SummerFest' will feature soccer tournament, art exhibition, bouncy castles and face painting for children and musical entertainment including music from Elikya, a Limerick-based Congolese choir.

*"We are hoping to emulate the success of last year's 'SummerFest', which brought together refugees and asylum seekers with members of the local community. It is a day of celebration for the Region's refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and local people. It also presents an opportunity to the local communities to learn more about other cultures and traditions. I would appeal to the people of Limerick to show their solidarity with those people in a situation once faced by Irish people all over the world", concluded Ms. Oyewo*

Doras Luimní came together in 2000 to respond to the refugee situation in Limerick City and surrounding areas. Its aims are to open doors for those seeking asylum and refuge, to inform and involve the local community in dealing with issues of asylum-seekers, multiculturalism and racism, and to work with the statutory and voluntary bodies in planning and implementing programmes to support asylum seekers and refugees. It has recently extended its remit to cater for the needs of those from migrant countries.

Doras Luimní regularly hosts activities aimed at improving the experience and lives of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. These include regular visits to hostels, social evenings and outings, music and art workshops, computer and English classes, advice and support services, and sporting events.