

Anti-immigration activists disrupt information meeting in Waterford town

There were confrontational scenes at a public information meeting in a Waterford town as anti-immigration activists were among people criticizing plans to resettle Syrian refugees there.

The meeting at Lismore Heritage Centre – at which gardaí were present – followed the town's selection to participate in Community Sponsorship Ireland, a pilot project that seeks to encourage and support local communities to 'adopt' and resettle "one or two" refugee families.



The public information meeting in Lismore today. Pic: Catherine Rotte-Murray

Among those addressing the audience of around 160 people were David Stanton, Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality and Eibhlin Byrne, director of the Community Sponsorship Programme at the Department of Justice, as well as Zuhair Al Fakir, father of a Syrian family of three resettled in Dunshaughlin.

Most of the objectors, who were dispersed among the crowd, are understood to have been from outside the town.

They included a Dublin-based self-styled "citizen journalist" who promotes hard- and far-right figures and who recently sparked controversy when filming an anti-racism rally in Rooskey where a hotel earmarked for asylum seekers had twice been set on fire.

There were calls for the self-styled citizen journalist to be ejected and claims he was filming the proceedings for a hard-right agenda. Several times he demanded Mr Stanton "confirm or deny that there are Isis members in Direct Provision".

A woman who said she was 'local' and a mother confronted Mr Stanton to complain that as an Irish woman she had "not been welcomed" into the community and was suffering substandard housing.

Other unidentified individuals aired diverse grievances.

One man insisted that “our own people be looked after first”. Another believed the Irish would be “a minority in our own country” amidst concern that “Leo Varadkar intends to bring two million Syrians into Ireland”.

One individual cited “no democracy in Ireland” on foot of the jailing of Killarney anti-eviction campaigner Brian McCarthy.

Ms Byrne said Lismore’s response to “the hatred which was displayed this evening” would be to “make this a resounding success”. She and her fellow guests received a standing ovation.

Community Sponsorship Ireland is a collaborative venture between the Department of Justice and Equality, UNHCR, non-government organisations and the public.



The public information meeting in Lismore today. Pic: Catherine Rotte-Murray
One individual cited “no democracy in Ireland” on foot of It was devised in Canada and is being considered in New Zealand, Argentina and Britain. Here it is seen as a potential alternative to Direct Provision in line with the country’s commitment to accept 4,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict.

Meanwhile, the country’s biggest aid agencies have urged the Government to keep up its support for Syria’s millions of refugees.

Concern, Goal and Trocaire told an Oireachtas committee that while the nine-year war was largely over, areas where they worked still endured daily air strikes and it was unsafe for many displaced Syrians to return home while the majority had little or nothing to go home to.

The EU and United Nations will jointly hold a conference in Brussels next week on supporting the future of Syria.

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