

PE1514/C

Interfaith Scotland Letter of 2 June 2014

Response to Petition number PE1514

Petition summary

Petitioner: Norman Bonney

Calls on the Parliament to ensure that each year its weekly 'Time for Reflection' fulfils its ambition of being representative of the diversity of religion and belief in Scotland by limiting representatives of religious denominations to one half of the presentations and ensuring that twenty five per cent of all sessions are presented by atheists

Please find attached the response from individual members of Interfaith Scotland. Can I also pass on the request of those gathered at the meeting facilitated by Interfaith Scotland, that the Petitions Committee also contact the diverse faith communities of Scotland individually as this will garner many more responses.

Interfaith Scotland facilitated a dialogue about Petition PE1514 between individuals from the following faith traditions:

Church of Scotland
Roman Catholic
Muslim
Jewish
Sikh
Baha'i
United Reform

Those present agreed the following response to the Petition;

The opportunity to take the time for reflection is very much appreciated by the diverse faith communities of Scotland. Indeed a key strength of the Time for Reflection is the wide diversity of faith traditions who have been able to contribute, demonstrating Scotland's, and the Parliament's, commitment to celebrating the rich religious culture of Scotland. It was also noted that around 13% of those contributing are from a non-faith background and this is also appreciated as fair and proportionate.

Although the majority of speakers at the Time for Reflection are religious, the fact that the speakers come from a wide variety of traditions, ensures that there are diverse reflections shared with those present. The 38% from the Church of Scotland is also proportionate as the majority of religious people in Scotland belong to the Church of Scotland.

The petitioner has suggested that 25% of all sessions are presented by atheists and it was felt that this would not be proportionate as according to the Census figures for

2011 only 0.05% of the Scottish Population registered that they were 'atheist'. It would be unfair for such a small percentage of the population to speak on behalf of those within Scotland who state they are non-religious but who have not indicated that they are 'atheist'. We would anticipate that many stating they are non-religious may define themselves as spiritual, or may enjoy religious celebrations at key family and civic events and rituals and would not want the voice of religious people diminished.

The submission from Gus Logan was felt to more accurately represent the feelings of the ordinary members of the public as he stated 'that this petition is unrepresentative of the views of most of Scotland's population' who have a 'deep attachment to Scotland's rich cultural, historical and religious traditions'.

The individuals from the faith traditions identified in this response were all agreed that they would be delighted to hear other voices at the Time for Reflection and suggested that consideration be given to Charity organisations, teachers and health professionals who contribute so extensively to the life of Scotland.

It has already been noted by a previous contributor (Gus Logan) that this petition is indicative of a campaign that demonstrates a 'lack of tolerance towards Scotland's faith groups'.

A final point to note is that Time for Reflection is a four minute slot, for faith based reflection during Scottish Parliamentary time, in a week full of non-faith based reflection, thought and discourse, indeed the total time spent on faith based reflection is minuscule.

The individuals from the diverse faith traditions submitting this response would urge Parliament to refuse this petition on the grounds that the current Time for Reflection is fit for purpose and that to allow atheists to dominate 25% of the Time for Reflection would be disproportionate and would be misrepresentative of the views of the majority of the Scottish population.

Dr Maureen Sier
Director
Interfaith Scotland