

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the Cultural Commission. *Mrs Unis Spicy Foods* is a well-established small to medium sized south Asian enterprise based in Edinburgh. Mrs Unis has been supportive of a range of arts and cultural activities over many years and the business became a sponsor of the early Edinburgh Mela. *Mrs Unis Spicy Foods* continues to be actively involved in supporting the Mela and her staff are all involved as audience members. Both Mrs Unis and some members of her staff are actively involved in a new Mela initiative for women, Sakhian, first explored at the 2004 Mela.

In recent years *Mrs Unis Spicy Foods* has developed alongside the increasingly diverse cultural activity in the East of Scotland. Indeed, art and design has been a factor in the new branding of the business, as well as being a sector with which the business can increasingly trade. Although we are from a south Asian background, our business recognises that our market is the whole of the mainstream.

We are submitting a number of bullet points rather than going into detail. If you need any of these issues to be expanded upon please let me know

- ◆ As with our own business, the market for minority ethnic arts should be recognised as the whole community, and minority ethnic arts initiatives should be seen as part of the mainstream of provision rather than being seen on the margins, as is often the case.
- ◆ A fairer and more equitable means of funding arts and cultural initiatives in the minority ethnic communities is desirable, recognising that there is complex cultural diversity present in Scotland – a system centred on one minority ethnic officer in the Scottish Arts Council coordinating policy development and advising on grants is not an equitable approach. In theory the minority communities appear to have equal rights but in practice this is not felt to be the situation.
- ◆ Funding and supporting a vibrant arts and cultural scene among minority communities is important for the whole country in terms of community cohesion, community development and developing educational balance. In terms of individual rights it is important that the reality of the cultural complexity of Scotland is recognised with widely differing needs among any one 'identifiable' cultural grouping, and that the key is for people not to be put into convenient 'boxes'.
- ◆ Culture and the arts have a wide relevance across most aspects of Scottish society, including the business sector, so funding support needs to be addressed by a wider range of public institutions and national and local authority departments. For example, although it is not generally credited as such, Edinburgh Mela has become an important aspect of international relations between Scotland and the south Asian sub-continent with some importance for trade and international development activity. Although coming from a south Asian tradition, it very much helps to project a modern Scotland.
- ◆ Scottish society generally does not maximise the potential of people from the minority communities. The means to turn this situation round must be found. Strong and vibrant arts and cultural activity in the minority communities leads to strong and vibrant society.
- ◆ As many people in the minority communities are particularly disadvantaged through lack of income and lack of equal opportunity and fairness, their aspirations are often subdued within the society. It is important that people from minority communities also feel they can aspire to be contributors to the arts and cultural scene and for this to prevail there needs to be a right to equality, fairness, education and opportunity. This is especially so with regard to employment in the arts and cultural sector.
- ◆ It is important that we train the younger generation as done by the Mela. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding Mela is unable to continue this vital training involving the youth.
- ◆ Sakhian (the Woman's programme) would like to make further progress and establish its rightful place. I would very much like to expand this programme as I feel that women are not being exposed.
- ◆ In Scotland, we feel quite isolated, because almost all the famous/popular Asian artists are invited to England. I would like the Scottish Executive to look into this matter and try and persuade those artists to also make an appearance in Scotland, because of the vibrant community that is prevalent here.
- ◆ I would like the Scottish Executive to work more closely with Mela. Also, the Theatres in Edinburgh should be encouraged to include Asian artists in their programmes.

We trust that these points are helpful and look forward to any further contributions that might be made as the work of the Commission proceeds. We wish you well with your mission, and should be grateful to receive your feedback.

85

Ian

J B ✓ / Miss

From: mrs unis (mrsunis@tiscali.co.uk)

Sent: 27 September 2004 13:04

To: info

Subject: A request for your views from the Cultural Commission[Scanned]

Dear Mr. Boyle

In response to your request, please find attached my views.

Best wishes

Shaheen Unis (Mrs)

27/09/2004