



MEDIA RELEASE

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Migrants Get Lesson in UK Political Life

Even though Gordon Brown has decided against a snap election people from local migrant and refugee communities still want to find out how to take part in British political life.

A **Your Voice Matters** workshop will take place at Kensington and Chelsea Town Hall on October 18th - during Democracy Week – to explain how to become an active British citizen. And 70 people from 30 nationalities have signed up to take part.

Run by Kensington-based organisation New Citizens Voice, the workshop, which is supported by the local council, aims to help refugees and migrants to integrate into mainstream UK society by getting involved in the social, cultural, and political life of the borough.

Maria Leyva, managing director of New Citizens Voice, urges participants to become active members of society. "We want to tell these new citizens: you are a fully paid-up member of the UK society, so feel and act like one."

NCV will conduct a similar campaign in Southwark, another London borough with a large migrant community.

Among the topics to be covered in the three-hour workshop are 'how the UK government works'; 'the role of the Queen and the Prime Minister', 'running for political office'; and 'serving on a school's board of governors.' Participants will take part in a mock election and will have the opportunity for a follow-up visit to the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben.

There has been a significant increase in the size of new communities over the past decade, first due to immigration from the Third World, and recently as a result of the immigration of citizens of EU ascendancy states in search of work and a better life. In some London boroughs such as Kensington and Chelsea, the number of residents with little or no English

language ability or knowledge about services, presents a huge challenge to planners and providers.

“Projects like this one are crucial for the government’s policy of building an all-inclusive society,” said Maria Leyva. “No longer do new citizens need to think that it is OK for them to lag behind the rest of the nation. We are all a part of the UK, and we should feel just as proud of that fact as anybody else.”

Enrolment in the half-day workshop is free of charge, and there will be help for those with transportation problems or those for whom English is a second or even third language.

Further details are available from New Citizens Voice, Tel: 0207 7515829 or visit our website www.newcitizensvoice.com

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For further information contact:

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Note to Editors:

1. New Citizens Voice (NVC) is a non-governmental organisation based in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, with an established track record in delivering innovative projects for Britain’s migrant communities. In the past four years, it has run “Marshalling the Votes,” a series of workshops commissioned by the Electoral Commission intended to get new citizens interested in participating in national, local and EU elections, a radio talk show on migrants’ rights and entitlements funded by the Home Office, and “Your Voice Matters,” a campaign conducted in London in partnership with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea which involves workshops and trips to important democratic institutions such as the House of Lords. The organisation is managed by people who were born outside the UK but have since become full and active citizens of this country.
2. Maria Leyva points to herself as an example of an overseas-born migrant who has made the transformation into a full and active British citizen. Half Peruvian and half Spanish, she migrated to the UK as a young university graduate and quickly built up her language skills and embarked on a career in journalism. Her ambition and determination led to her employment with prestigious media organisations including the BBC and Spectrum Radio. She even began running her own radio talk show, “Onda Hispana.” She is a founding director of New Citizens Voice and has previously delivered citizenship projects in a number of boroughs including the Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Camden, and Waltham Forest.