

Opening Power to Diversity



Mariam Ayeni-Salami

Placed with Anne Ferris TD from September 2012 to March 2013

Biography

Mariam is from Nigeria. She has completed a Masters in Human Resource Management at the National College of Ireland and a Bachelor of Law from the University of Kent. Mariam is Youth Officer for the Ireland branch of the Nigerian political party Action Congress of Nigeria. Founder of KuSoma, a moving library project providing rural villages in Africa with access to books, Mariam recently organised a 'Young, Nigerian and Gifted' event to celebrate Nigeria's Independence. Mariam has worked as a presenter for Dublin City FM and is Vice Editor of SEADiaspora, an online publication covering African affairs.

Diary

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Prior to my first day, I knew the kind of work that I would be expected to do, the hours, but I really didn't know what the atmosphere would be like. I didn't know what to expect since Leinster House and working for a T.D isn't really something you can call a friend/colleague to ask for insight. So looking back that would definitely be what I was the most curious about.

My hope for this internship is that I am able to gain extensive valuable insight into what a Lawmaker's office/work/role entails. I hope that during my time there I add value, show that I am eager to learn even when shy.

On my first day, my first impressions of walking through Leinster House and along the hallways with pictures of former and present Irish politicians on the wall was just sheer awe at the amount of history that has, is and will be made in this building. I saw people who were passionate about their country, community and were active citizens. One of the things I noticed straight away was how busy most TD's including Anne were and how invaluable the support they get from the assistants is in helping them deal with the administrative and back office end of their role.

Although it has only been just over a month since I started my internship at Labour TD Anne Ferris's office, it feels like much longer. This is because I have already engaged in a range of interesting tasks and responsibilities and have been made to feel so welcomed by Deputy Anne Ferris and her Parliamentary Assistant Jody Madigan. Both of them are very approachable, down to earth, and welcoming. This made me settle in much quicker than I expected. As with any first day anywhere, I was equally nervous and excited, wondering what my experience would be like and hoped that I would really add value to Deputy Ferris's office and also learn about the ins and outs of what it is really like to be a politician in Ireland today with the many issues the country is facing. On my first day, Jody introduced me to everyone on the floor and I was genuinely surprised when the following week, I was walking by and they all still remembered my name and asked how I was getting on, asked questions to get to know me better without making me feel awkward.

My First week: I got into some filing and from the filing alone I got a significant insight into the extensive amount of policy areas that politicians are required to keep their tabs on. I knew instantly that no two days must ever be the same for a TD and their assistants. The second day I was briefed by Jody as to the areas I would be working on and upcoming projects, which I was very comfortable and pleased with as they matched my background and things that I like doing, such as Anne's social media engagement, press releases, research and media/news watch that were relevant to Anne's constituency. What also stood out to me was the fact that they inquired if there were any particular policy areas that I was especially interested in, so it could be kept in mind, in case any briefings or conferences or events came up. I started drafting a local press release on my second day, I couldn't believe it.

I have also attended a briefing which was held by an Inspector General from Sweden's Trafficking Police Unit, who explained how pragmatic and successful their Human Trafficking Laws/Approach have been in relation to prostitution, and how beneficial it has been in reducing the rate of crime in his unit. This was attended by various lawmakers and their parliamentary assistants to see how Ireland can learn from the Swedish experience.

Another highlight was also attending the Policy Network's Progressive Governance Seminar which was hosted by the Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore. I really enjoyed the seminar, it was very engaging, and I had the opportunity to meet some exciting people. I had an interesting conversation at lunch with Wendy Carlin a Professor of Economics at the University College of London, who also delivered a paper on the day. I was trying not to pinch myself to think that I was having a conversation with her on the role of women in politics and comparisons between Ireland and Sweden. Being in that room, hearing people who are experts in their respective fields, economic advisors, members of government and policy makers on what the future should hold and how government can deliver this future sustainably was fascinating, because as one of the youngest people in that room, I know that their ideologies/decisions could possibly have a direct impact on my life. It was intriguing to experience this seminar.

Overall, so far I am really enjoying my internship, I feel like I'm contributing and gaining invaluable insight into the law making process. I also like the ambience of Leinster House, when there is no rain I love sitting on the benches outside on my lunch watching people go in and out.

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Its now half way through my internship at Dáil Éireann in Deputy Anne Ferris's office and I really cannot believe how fast time has gone. They say it flies when you are having fun and this couldn't be more true. I am really enjoying the experience of working in Anne Ferris's office.

I have settled in quite well and since my last diary article, I have been working on different projects such as helping to set up Anne's blog, researching topical areas and synopsising the areas, and writing more press releases.

I really enjoy attending briefings because you get to hear about the research different bodies have conducted and their recommendations for future policy direction and Government action. You also get to see people in Government asking questions about the research so it is very interesting to see how Government liaise with external bodies. One of the briefings that I attended that really stood out for me was the one organised by the National Women's Council of Ireland which looked at the position of women in the Irish Constitution. Being a young woman in Ireland I am interested in what the Constitution says about a woman's rights as I consider it a symbolic statement of how the Irish people value women.

The briefing looked at the position of women in the 1937 Constitution as being subordinate to men and limited to the role of being responsible for child care and other caring work within the family in Ireland. The position of women in Ireland has changed and the report called for many reforms. The

one that stood out was the call for a new framework for women in Irish society and a mixed electoral system to ensure an increase of women's participation in politics and public life.

The best part about that particular briefing was the little treat at the end of the briefing where Kathy D'Arcy did a wonderful short performance from her play 'This is my Constitution' which was based on material in the Irish National Archives and documents about the campaign that Irish women in 1937 initiated to have the wording of the proposed Irish Constitution amended. The wording being challenged stated that 'by her life within the home a woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved'. It was really interesting to see that women have challenged the way the Constitution regarded and still regards them. In relation to the Constitution I also did some research on the constitutional convention which I believe is a unique way of looking at parts of the current Constitution that serve modern Ireland well and parts that don't. I have been able to look at some of the areas that will be reviewed via the convention such as same sex marriage, reducing the voting age, reviewing the Dáil electoral system and letting the Irish diaspora vote in certain elections.

I have also been researching laws surrounding the Incitement of Hatred Act in Ireland following another very interesting and engaging briefing I attended. It is however viewed as very ineffective by some and rarely used.

I am conscious and shocked that I only have a couple of weeks left of the internship so I hope to make the most of it by engaging in more tasks, learning more, meeting more people and attending more briefings. I enjoy researching laws and policies and reading/hearing the different viewpoints.



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