**Press release issued by EQUAL PLATFORM** 11 February 2009

**BANGLADESHI BRITISH PLAYWRIGHT SAYS:**

**ENGLAND PEOPLE VERY NICE is racist**

**Anti-Irish, Anti-Bangladeshi and Islamophobic**

England People Very Nice is a new play by Richard Bean at the National Theatre. It is offensive towards ethnic minorities. It is particularly offensive towards the Irish and Bangladeshis. Those involved in staging this production need to explain themselves and be brought to account.

It is shocking that the National Theatre commissioned this play, and even more shocking that it decided to put it on. The top man at the National Theatre, Nicholas Hytner, also chooses to direct it. We can take it that England People Very Nice represents the aspirations of the National Theatre.

People should go and see this play – if only to witness the level of debate about multiculturalism we have at our national institutions. The level is so low that you paddle about in the gutter. Artistically and dramatically the play has no merit. It is skinny, dull and badly constructed. And people wonder why British theatre is in crisis?

This play consists of a bunch of tired stereotypes and racist myths thrown together for cheap laughs at the expense of minorities. Art should make you think, understand and feel something about the world. With good art you are challenged, and you learn and change. When you leave this play you haven’t changed. Stereotypes and myths that you find in the worst tabloids are reinforced.

The play purports to be about the history of migration into Spitalfields. Refugees are all stupid. Nigerian men beat women. The Irish are wife beaters, alcoholics and commit incest. Bangladeshis youth are muggers, drug dealer, or addicts, and jihadists. And the older generation all marry their cousins. The French are “frogs”.

**This play cannot go unchallenged. We want the space to voice our concerns in public. We have the following demands to be considered immediately:**

**1]** A meeting with Nicholas Hytner, artistic director of the National Theatre, with a delegation of artists from the East End Bangladeshi community and other communities, including the Irish community.

**2]** A right of reply produced by EQUAL PLATFORM challenging the myths and stereotypes to be given to every audience member, and put onto the National Theatre website.

**3]** A public debate at the Olivier Theatre with the Richard Bean, the writer, Nicholas Hytner, artistic director, and members of EQUAL PLATFORM (artists from various communities).

**EQUAL PLATFORM** was set up by HUSSAIN ISMAIL to bring together like-minded artists to promote different voices in the arts and challenge intolerance and prejudice. EQUAL PLATFORM will be organising pickets outside the National Theatre and an online petition (see Facebook – ‘England People Very Nice is racist’ group).

HUSSAIN ISMAIL is a playwright and artistic director of Soulfire Theatre. He is of Bangladeshi origin. He was born in and lives in Whitechapel, East London.

**- END**

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