

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

18 November 2008

British actors shine a light on 'illegal' immigrants

WHAT: Launch of *The Illegals*
WHEN: Friday 21 November, 1:00pm
WHERE: Soho Theatre, 21 Dean Street, London, W1D 3NE

Actors for Human Rights, iceandfire theatre's national outreach network, is launching a new production, which comprises of first-hand testimonies of undocumented migrants living and working in London. *The Illegals* launches on Friday 21 November, 1pm, at the Soho Theatre. Once launched, the production will be available to groups or individuals wishing to host a performance in their community.

The subject of immigration has always been a political hot-potato, and in the lead up to the general election next year the issue of undocumented migrants will be high on both parties' agendas. *The Illegals* offers a rare insight into the lives of these people who, being outside any formal system, are forced to be silent.

Christine Bacon, Director of Actors for Human Rights, interviewed seven such individuals to create *The Illegals*. According to Ms Bacon:

"As actors we can give faces and voices to the unseen and the unheard. We try to redress some of the misconceptions about undocumented migrants with accurate information and personal stories.

"The stories told in *The Illegals* reveal that undocumented migrants have many and varied reasons for coming to the UK. They also reveal the hardships and exploitation many of them face while living here and the crucial contribution they make to London."

Ayattu is a well-educated Ethiopian man who has lived in London for almost 15 years and worked legally as a storeman for ten of those years. But after immigration crackdowns in 2006 he was forced to go underground.

"What I thought, by obeying the law, was that one day they will give me legal status. At least let me go and work without fear and be a productive citizen. It's common sense. I leave it for the British people to decide," he says.

Ayattu's story is told along with two domestic workers from Sri Lanka and Morocco, an ambitious Guatemalan actress, two Ecuadorian cleaners and a Chinese man who has worked in factories and takeaway shops across the UK. Most of the people interviewed have tried their best to comply with immigration law but have been left confused or intimidated by the Home Office process.

Sara Masters, co-Artistic Director of iceandfire theatre, says that the company's mission is to create compelling theatre that makes real and relevant the impact of human rights issues on our everyday lives.

"*The Illegals* will show British audiences that undocumented migrants are a key part of our society, and gives us a glimpse into the lives of this much derided and misunderstood group of individuals, says Ms Masters.

For more information about this press release, or to arrange an interview with Christine Bacon, please call Charlotte George, Media Officer, on 07954 199 307, media@iceandfire.co.uk www.iceandfire.co.uk/afhr

The project has been funded by City Parochial Foundation (CPF). Bharat Mehta, Chief Executive of CPF, comments:

“For some time we have been concerned about the difficulties and extreme poverty that many undocumented migrants live in. Unfortunately undocumented migrants have no way of practically enforcing their rights and are at particular risk of exploitation. We were keen to support the production of *The Illegals* because it highlights this dilemma and brings first-hand personal testimony of the lives of these Londoners to a public audience. We hope that this work, as well as other projects we are funding, will lead to positive changes for undocumented migrants.”

Groups and individuals can host a rehearsed reading of *The Illegals*, or other Actors for Human Rights shows. More info: www.iceandfire.co.uk/afhr.

Notes to the editor:

iceandfire creates compelling theatre that makes real and relevant the impact of human rights issues on our everyday lives. The company was founded in 2003 by playwright Sonja Linden inspired by her seven years as writer in residence at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. Over the last six years they have become a theatre company with a distinct, contemporary voice creating work of excellence across our four work strands: production, outreach, education and participation.

www.iceandfire.co.uk.

Actors for Human Rights is iceandfire’s national outreach network, made up of over 300 professional actors who are dedicated to drawing public attention to a range of contemporary human rights concerns. The performers involved donate their time and their profile to encourage public acceptance of human rights and to give voice to people whose basic human rights have been violated.

www.iceandfire.co.uk/afhr

City Parochial Foundation is an independent charitable trust which aims to enable and empower the poor of London to tackle poverty and its root causes. It provides funding of over £6 million each year to voluntary and community groups and works to ensure that its funds reach those most in need.

www.cityparochial.org.uk

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