

Mr Mark Rosenshield,
Welsh Affairs Office,
USA Embassy
24 Grosvenor Square
London
W1A 1AE

18/06/09

Dear Mr Mark Rosenshield,

I am writing to you on behalf of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg concerning Arfon Gwilym, a Welsh folk singer and language activist, who has been banned from entering the United States of America, to attend the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, because of his so called 'criminal record'. We are an organisation that campaigns for the rights of Welsh speakers in Wales and Arfon has played a significant part in our campaigns.

We should like to emphasise that Arfon Gwilym is a man of great integrity who is highly regarded in Wales because of his stand on matters of principle and basic human justice. He is also an outstanding entertainer who has made an enormous contribution to Welsh folk singing tradition.

His criminal record was acquired because of his involvement in campaigns to win equal status in Wales for Welsh language speakers. He has fought energetically to secure such things as bilingual road signs in Wales, a Welsh language television service and a Welsh Language Act ensuring that Welsh speakers have the same linguistic rights as English speakers in our country. These campaigns did involve a certain amount of law breaking activity but those who participated also took full responsibility for their actions and voluntarily gave themselves up to the police. Historians in Wales refer to this kind of activism as 'non violent direct action' since those who took part always confined their activities to a limited destruction of property. Great care was always taken to make sure that people were not harmed in any way because of these activities. Gandhi and Martin Luther King were the inspiration behind this kind of activity. It is interesting that local authorities in Wales are now erecting plaques to commemorate some of the earlier campaigns with which Arfon Gwilym himself was very much involved.

Over the years, over 2,000 people have been arrested in Wales for taking action similar to that taken by Arfon Gwilym. Many of them by now are prominent figures in Welsh society and like Arfon Gwilym himself held in very high regard. I am also quite sure that many of them have visited the USA over the years without any trouble at all.

To refuse Arfon Gwilym the right to enter the United States would be equivalent to the British government refusing Martin Luther King entry into Britain in the 1960's because of his political activities.

We ask you to reconsider your decision not to allow Arfon Gwilym to enter the United States because that is the just and honourable thing to do. It is also what one would expect from a country that puts such an emphasis on freedom, equality and human rights.

Yours sincerely

Dafydd Morgan Lewis

Administrative Officer
Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg