

18/02/2010

PRESS RELEASE

Doorman's Racism Costs Belfast Club £15,000

A planned night out at a Belfast club for Joanne McGuinness and Domingos Lopes ended when a doorman denied them access and subjected them to a torrent of racist and sexist abuse. The pair have now been awarded £7,500 each by the Belfast Recorder's Court, which also awarded costs to the claimants.



Joanne McGuinness (25) and Domingos Lopes (30) brought the case, with the assistance of the Equality Commission, after they had been refused entry, in September 2008, to the Bambu Beach Club, then owned by Premium Bars and Restaurants PLC and situated in the Odyssey Complex. The Bambu Beach Club is now under different ownership.

The doorman of the club refused entrance to the friends and then made sexually obscene and insulting remarks to Ms McGuinness and a series of obscene, crude and demeaning racist remarks to Mr Lopes, who is Portuguese and black, including calling him a "nigger" and a "black bastard". The Court found that they were discriminated against on the grounds of sex and race.

Judge Aidan Corrigan, who heard the case at Belfast County Court on 18 January 2010, said that Ms McGuinness and Mr. Lopes had been subjected by door staff at the Club to remarks which were unjustified and vile, and constituted the worst type of race

discrimination. He also found that other staff, including management, witnessed what had happened and did nothing to stop it.

Ms McGuinness said: "What happened at the Beach Club shouldn't happen to anybody. Although we had done nothing wrong we were made to feel very small and humiliated in front of a whole queue of people. We're both grateful that the Commission supported our case."

Eileen Lavery, Head of Strategic Enforcement at the Equality Commission said: "These two people, going along with friends to enjoy a night out, were not only refused entry but were humiliated by the racist, sexist and demeaning remarks by the club doorman in front of twenty or thirty other people in the queue for the Bambu Beach Club. In this case the Judge has included compensation for aggravated damages, and categorised this as the worst type of race discrimination.

"The outcome of this case makes it clear that behaviour of this type is not merely socially unacceptable, but is also unlawful and must be challenged. All businesses have a responsibility to ensure their staff do not engage in such behaviour and that if they fail in that responsibility they will pay a heavy penalty for it."