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PRESS RELEASE

Employers conference on migrant workers in Northern Ireland

"By providing a welcoming working environment for people who come here from all over the world, employers are making a vital contribution to combating racial prejudice in wider society," Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said today.



Dr. Wardlow was making the opening address at a Conference which brought together members of the business community from across Northern Ireland to discuss the rights of migrant workers in employment and accessing services; and to share examples of best practice in dealing with some of the difficulties encountered by people who have come here from other countries.

"Recent well publicised incidents of deplorable racist violence are a reminder of how urgent and important it is that everyone; workers, employers, service providers and statutory bodies continue to work together to challenge such unacceptable behaviour," Dr. Wardlow said.

"We can all benefit from the experience which employers in Northern Ireland have built up, over many years when sectarian violence was rife in the community, in maintaining good and harmonious relationships within the workplace."

"The present revision by the Northern Ireland Executive of its Racial Equality Strategy also provides an ideal opportunity to consider further measures to tackle prejudicial attitudes and to promote values of acceptance and respect for difference in our society," he said. "We would urge the Executive to prioritise actions to reduce and work towards the elimination of racial violence" Dr. Wardlow said.

Jonathan Bell MLA and Jennifer McCann MLA, Junior Ministers at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, gave the keynote address to the Conference.

Junior Minister Jonathan Bell said: "Every attack, act of intimidation or any form of racism is totally abhorrent and condemned by every right thinking person in Northern Ireland. The Executive recognises the difficulties our migrant workforce face and is working together to remove any obstacle or barrier that may impede their potential to

fully integrate and contribute to our society. I commend the Equality Commission for its determination to help improve the lives of migrant workers in Northern Ireland and help us all benefit from this valuable sector of our community.”

Junior Minister Jennifer McCann continued: “We must all reject racism and discrimination in every form. We all benefit from a more culturally diverse society. New people bring new ideas to our industry and culture. By embracing the fact that more people wish to live and work here, we are creating a society of opportunity. Working together we will deny those who would use violence and intimidation. Working together, we can thrive and prosper.”

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is launching new research at the Conference, which explores links between poverty and ethnicity so as to enable a more effective tackling of poverty across different ethnic groups within Northern Ireland.

Delegates to the Conference also heard of the challenges faced by migrant workers in Northern Ireland and about their experiences, from Jolena Flett, Manager of the Belfast Migrant Centre, and Denis Long, from the Roma Community Development Project .

The event concludes with workshops and a final session on the support and advice that is offered to employers by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

ENDS

Note to Editor:

- The event was held on Wednesday 21st May 2014 in Malone House, Belfast
- Speakers include: Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; Jonathan Bell MLA and Jennifer McCann MLA, Junior Ministers at the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister ; Jolena Flett ,Manager, Belfast Migrant Centre and Denis Long, Roma Community Development Project.
- Workshops were facilitated by Concentrix, Belfast HSCT, Bernadette McAliskey, STEP and Equality Commission staff.