

7 March 2014

Press Release

**Time for a Change – International Women’s Day
8 March, ‘Inspiring Change’**



In a year when people in Northern Ireland will vote in both local council elections and elections to the European Parliament, the Equality Commission is calling on the Executive and the Northern Ireland political parties to take action to increase the representation of women in Northern Ireland in political and public life.

Speaking ahead of this year’s International Women’s Day on March 8, Evelyn Collins CBE, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission, said that the persistent under-representation of women in political and public life in Northern Ireland is significant. “This is despite the fact that, for the past twelve years, the law has allowed special measures^[1] to be taken by political parties to reduce inequality between the numbers of women and men chosen as candidates.

“Gender equality is a key element in any democracy,” Ms. Collins said, “and now, almost forty years on from the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Order, we need a focus on the remaining issues which act as barriers to the full participation of women at all levels in our society.”

At present, although women are over half of the population in Northern Ireland, just one in five of MLAs is female and only one in four councillors.

“We still haven’t seen political parties make use of all of the positive action measures allowed under the law. We would like to see parties setting targets for improving their own gender balance at all levels of political representation.

“The Equality Commission will be looking to OFMDFM’s Gender Equality Strategy and seeking more focus on measurable targets and annual updates on progress across a range of issues. We have made recommendations to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) regarding political and public life, education for girls and women, employment and related issues such as equal pay and affordable childcare. A new strategy should give a new impetus to work towards equality between men and women.”

^[1] The Sex Discrimination (Election of Parliamentary Candidates) Act 2002

The Equality Commission is supporting a programme of International Women's Day events in Belfast organised by Reclaim the Agenda. We are also supporting events in County Tyrone, one organised by the Omagh Area Women's Network and one by the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network in Cookstown.