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PRESS RELEASE

Leaders have a responsibility to promote good relations

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has expressed its dismay about Pastor James McConnell's unacceptable remarks on Islam and Muslims and its concern over the subsequent intervention from the First Minister Peter Robinson.

Following its monthly meeting today (Wednesday May 28, 2014), the Chief Commissioner Dr Michael Wardlow said: "Commissioners have expressed their dismay at the remarks by Pastor McConnell. Comments which negatively stereotype entire communities are unacceptable.

"They have also expressed their concern at the intervention of the First Minister.

"It is incumbent on all leaders in public life to demonstrate in what they say, and what they do not say, a real and true respect for all human beings.

"We have seen an alarming increase in race attacks across our community over a relatively short period. Everyone who lives in Northern Ireland has a right to peace of mind, to feel safe in their own homes and to be seen as equals.

"We consider that those in a leadership role have a particular responsibility to uphold respect for others and promote good relations across and within our communities.

"That means moving beyond a simple condemnation of violence, important as that may be.

"Those in a position to influence others should not use language which may increase the vulnerability and legitimate fears of people who already feel isolated and under attack because of their race and religion."

Further reflections on negative stereotyping are explored in a new blog issued by the Commission today www.equalityni.org/heresthething