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[Blog article](#) by Rev Lesley Carroll, Deputy Chief Commissioner

The Magic of Mela

On Sunday 27 August I was privileged to represent the Equality Commission at the Belfast Mela. It was a refreshing and inspiring event, lit up by the sounds, colours and smells of the food - the clothing, culture and faiths that make up our society. It was a tangible expression of the concept of good relations in this community – something which the Equality Commission has a statutory remit to promote under the Race Relations Order.

The Mela (which means 'meet') reminded me that the Equality Commission's work is first and foremost about people. We challenge discrimination where it arises and ensure that legal protections for minority groups are maintained in order that everyone who lives in Northern Ireland can experience equality and fulfil their potential as equal members of society.

Mela offered the added bonus of discovering and celebrating the joy of diversity. It was an afternoon of relaxed enjoyment and many smiling faces. Without question diversity can be celebrated as an enriching experience for all.



The various stalls showcased the work of organisations who face the challenges of supporting those who experience hate crime and those who are tasked with addressing these heinous crimes through the criminal justice system. In the midst of celebration their work is a timely reminder of the outcomes that can flow from misunderstanding, fear and outright hatred. Those who have experienced the full force of hate crime or discrimination because of their race know beyond doubt that 'equality matters' - but it matters for us all, for the enrichment of our society and the joy we can experience when we are open welcoming to one another.

The Equality Commission was established as one of the pillars by which a more equal

society imagined in the Belfast Good Friday Agreement would be delivered. As such, it carries the experience of confronting discrimination on grounds of religion or gender over many years, in employment and housing for example. But it also tackles inequalities which have been given legal protection in more recent times, such as sexuality and ethnicity; age and disability. The Commission plays a critical role in this architecture to ensure that we have a peaceful, shared and more equal society.

My thanks to ArtsEkta and the Belfast Mela for the reminder of how our work impacts real people's lives in their day to day experiences. They bring to the forefront the reality of our work in treasuring the experience of joy in diversity.

Photo Caption: (left to right) Equality Commissioner Hazel Francey and Rev Lesley Carroll, Deputy Chief Commissioner