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Call to alleviate food shortages for Jewish community

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission are calling on the UK Government and the European Union to find an urgent solution to alleviate the ongoing shortages of kosher food in Northern Ireland following Brexit.

Despite reports that the Secretary of State RT Hon Brandon Lewis CBE has pledged his support to resolve the matter, the Jewish community continues to face major issues sourcing kosher food here. This is because of the practical difficulties of finding suppliers from Great Britain to undertake the complicated process of delivering these supplies to Northern Ireland.

Mr Michael Black, Chair of the Belfast Jewish Community, said: “Due to the new barriers, our cupboards are nearly bare of kosher foods. Our local community is facing enormous difficulties in the practice of our faith. If these shortages are not addressed soon, we will face real difficulty daily as well as in celebrating major events in our religious calendar such as the Jewish Passover in April. Ultimately these shortages may impact on the viability of our historic community in Belfast. We have had many promises, but we need action and would urge all parties to get involved to work constructively and quickly to find a solution.”

Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for NI and Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner, NIHRC, said:

“It is really important that minority groups such as our local Jewish community are protected in post-Brexit Northern Ireland. The Commissions have raised this matter with the House of Lords Sub Committee on the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.

“Under Article 2 of the Northern Ireland/Ireland Protocol, the UK Government has committed to maintaining certain equality and human rights after Brexit. Both Commissions have been given additional powers and responsibilities to ensure that the UK Government upholds this commitment and also have a role in considering and assessing the impact of Brexit on our faith-based communities.

“We will continue to monitor closely the negotiations in relation to the export of chilled meats from GB to NI and assess the potential impact on religious groups and their ability to access food and ritual products.

“As small communities, minority faith groups must not be overlooked in Northern Ireland. Failure to deal with this issue will have a serious detrimental effect on the Jewish community. It is important that the EU and the UK Government find a solution to this issue as soon as is practicable.”