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PRESS RELEASE

The Empire Bar in Race Case Ruling

When Julius Anakaa sat down for a cool drink on a sunny day in the Empire Bar's beer garden in Belfast's Botanic Avenue it wasn't the pleasant experience he had hoped for - he ended up leaving the bar after being falsely accused of drinking a "carry-out" and a district court judge in Belfast has now ruled that his treatment was on the grounds of his race.

Mr. Anakaa, assisted by the Equality Commission, took the case alleging racial discrimination against the owners of the bar, Wine Inns Ltd. He was awarded £4,000 compensation and the court issued an injunction ordering the Defendants not to subject him to unlawful discrimination or victimization in the future.

When Mr. Anakaa and a friend bought a beer and a soft drink at the bar they went outside to the beer garden, joined some strangers at a table and engaged in friendly conversation. After buying more drinks from the bar, Julius was accused of drinking 'a carryout'. When this was put to him he immediately denied the allegation and complained to the manager but received no satisfaction, and was so offended that he left the bar. Mr. Anakaa believed his treatment was on the basis of his race – he is a black African, and he and his friend were the only black people in the beer garden.

He wrote a letter of complaint to the owners, seeking to deal with the matter without acrimony, but clearly alleging that his treatment was racially motivated. However, instead of receiving a letter of apology or regret he received a letter from the owners of the bar through their solicitors which, the judge stated, "*launched into a stentorian tirade*

of bald denial and threats.” In that letter Mr. Anakaa was threatened that he could face high court action if he repeated his allegations of racial abuse to any third party. The district judge has said that the terms of this letter were prompted by virtue of Mr. Anakaa’s racial grouping and that this response to Mr. Anakaa’s complaint was a further act of unlawful discrimination and victimization.

Julius Anakaa said: “I have lived in Belfast for 13 years and had been to the Empire Bar before with friends and really enjoyed it. In fact it was my idea to go there on the day in question. I was totally shocked and very embarrassed when I was accused of drinking ‘a carryout’ on licensed premises. The beer I was drinking was purchased from the bar.

“I was so offended I offered to let the staff look in my rucksack to prove I was not concealing any alcohol.” He continued: “All I wanted was an apology, just someone to admit that I had been treated unfairly and to recognise that it was wrong. When I received the letter from the solicitors I decided to approach the Equality Commission for advice. I am very grateful for the help and support the Equality Commission gave me throughout this case.”

Anne McKernan Casework Director at the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland said: “While we are encouraged that the Recorder’s Court has decided in Mr. Anakaa’s favour, it is most unfortunate that incidents such as this continue to occur. The treatment experienced by Julius highlights the need for everyone providing services to the public to make sure that they or their employees do not treat anyone less favourably on the basis of their race. “

Ms. McKernan continued: “Organisations should always investigate complaints by their customers properly and deal with them fairly. In addition to his treatment in the Empire Bar, Julius Anakaa was then sent a letter which made him feel even more humiliated and offended. The Court has marked that as an act of victimization, and has taken the welcome step in this case of issuing an injunction which will prevent the company from subjecting Julius Anakaa to any further unlawful discrimination if he decides to frequent the bar in the future. This sends a clear message that racism in all its forms is wrong and must be challenged.”

The Equality Commission provides free advice to anyone who feels they have suffered discrimination. In 2008/09 the Commission's Enquiry Line (028) 90500 600 received over 3500 enquiries and almost 15% of these calls were race related. More information on the Commission and its services is available from www.equalityni.org