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PRESS RELEASE

Traveller Focus Week

“Discrimination against Travellers is unlawful, just as it is against any other racial or ethnic group.” This is the core message from Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, ahead of this year’s Traveller Focus Week. “Irish Travellers are specifically identified in the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 as a racial or ethnic group with a *“shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life”*, yet we know from the Commission’s own research that prejudice against Travellers is higher than that against any other group,” Mr. Collins said.



The Week starts with a conference in the City Hotel, Armagh on Monday 30 November 2009, organised in conjunction with An Munia Tober. Travellers will be feeding their views into the decision-making process in a series of workshops featuring ‘Traveller Space’, which gives Travellers separate space to discuss and prioritise issues for their own community. During the week, there will be well over 30 other events all over Northern Ireland, all aimed at promoting awareness, discussion and debate on the Traveller community’s experiences of everyday life.

Bob Collins said, “The Equality Commission is leading the third annual Traveller Focus Week because, in spite of legal protection against discrimination, the Irish Traveller community still often experiences discrimination and inequality. Over this week, a whole range of events, entertaining, educational and thought-provoking, will highlight different aspects of Travellers’ lives including the continuing disadvantage they suffer in matters

of accommodation, education and health. It's also, of course, an opportunity to celebrate Traveller culture. We are very pleased to see such a wide range of events from the Traveller community and other partner organisations such as Traveller support groups and statutory agencies who are using the week to examine problems, identify solutions and promote good relations," said Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner.

The opening conference will look at how the policy framework on Traveller issues has developed since the Promoting Social Inclusion framework made its recommendations in 2001. It will be of interest to Travellers, Traveller support groups, NGOs and public sector agencies, government policy makers, equality and human rights organisations and elected representatives.

Traveller Focus Week has a full programme of events which includes discussion and debate events, play events and school activities and a range of artistic and cultural initiatives.

Traveller Focus Week will run from 30 November to 4 December 2009.

Caption: Michael Purcell, Southern Regional College, Derek Hanaway, An Munia Tober, Candy Sheridan, North Norfolk District Council, Paschal McCulla, OFMdFM, and Bob Collins, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission NI.

Notes to Editor

- The Equality Commission research report 'Outlining Minimum Standards for Traveller Accommodation' was launched in June 2009. A roundtable for stakeholders is one of the key events of Traveller Focus Week, see events list below.
- The findings of the Commission's Equality Awareness Survey suggest a hardening of views towards some people and also the complexities around those views. Attitudes became more intense as the respondents considered closer social contact with the groups in question. So, in attitudes towards many groups, more people would mind having them as an in-law, than would mind having them as a neighbour or a work colleague. The most negative attitudes were expressed towards Travellers, 51% stating they would mind if a close relative were to marry a Traveller, compared to 38% in 2005.

- 92% of Travellers leave school with no qualifications
- 11% of their community is in paid employment
- the infant mortality rate amongst Travellers is ten times the national average
- life expectancy is considerably lower than for non-Travellers