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PRESS RELEASE

A Month to Think About Race

November 2010 is Race Equality Month as the Equality Commission highlights the efforts being made throughout Northern Ireland to tackle racism and promote mutual respect and good relations between people from all cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Frank Fleming of the Equality Commission's Promotion and Education Department is leading the Race Equality Month initiative.

“With this initiative we aim to build on the good work which has been carried on in many of the workplaces of Northern Ireland to establish an ethos of equality and inclusivity. We need to bring the same focus into wider society,” Mr. Fleming says. “Here in Northern Ireland we still see the ugly face of racism from time to time – last year’s expulsion of the Roma and more than 1,000 race hate incidents in this last year alone. We cannot close our eyes to the reality that discrimination and racist attacks persist in Northern Ireland, as they do elsewhere. Such expressions of bigotry must be continually challenged, both in the community and in the workplace.”

“These things make headlines while efforts that many people make to tackle racism, on a daily basis, can go unnoticed.” he said. “Race Equality Month is a chance to see how much effort goes into creating a shared, equal and fairer society in Northern Ireland.” Race Equality Month starts on 1 November with a panel discussion event in Newry on the theme “Racism is Wrong” delivered by Challenge of Change and supported by the Equality Commission and Unite Against Hate.

Between 1 and 30 November there will be a series of events as diverse as a business breakfast, practical guidance for hospital staff on accommodating the religious and dietary needs of patients; a drama on race issues, art, photography, rights information

sessions, seminars, training events and even a specialised two-day Food Safety Certificate Course for the Chinese community in Limavady.

Frank Fleming says, "It is encouraging that there is such a variety of events, and it highlights the fact that the majority of people here see racial diversity as desirable and beneficial to society. It is only through reinforcing such positive messages and publicising the good work that is being done that we will challenge, and hopefully change, some of the deep-rooted racist attitudes that still persist in a minority of people."

"The Equality Commission mounts that challenge through the media, through initiatives with employers and trade unions and in our work with minority ethnic voluntary and community sectors. We work with many groups to produce guidance materials and training on racial issues in schools, in the health and social care field, and in planning and housing and accommodation. We also, of course, continue to work to eliminate unlawful discrimination on racial grounds in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services."

The Equality Commission is promoting a number of free training opportunities on race related issues during Race Equality Month.