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## PRESS RELEASE

### Commission supports Anti Homophobia Week

May 17, 1990, was the day on which the World Health Organisation removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. The date 17 May is now IDAHO day, (International day Against Homophobia) and is used worldwide to raise awareness of the issues of homophobia and transphobia.

This year in Northern Ireland, IDAHO day brings to a close the events of Anti-Homophobia Week, jointly organised by The Rainbow Project, HERE NI and Cara Friend and supported by the Equality Commission.

Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, commenting on Anti-Homophobia Week, said today at the start of the Week, “Our most recent public attitudes survey found significant levels of prejudice against Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people, but the highest level of negativity was reserved for the smaller minority of people who struggle with their gender identity – Trans people. Everyone has the same rights under our equality and hate crime laws to lead a life free from discrimination, abuse or harassment. But prejudice is still rife.

“We know from our work with the LGB sector and with Trans support groups that there is a high incidence of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and Trans people, but that reporting of discrimination is low.

“Our own surveys bear this out. While about half of LGB people we surveyed last year told us they had experienced discrimination, 8 out of 10 hadn’t reported it to anyone.



“The same public attitudes survey told us that only 22% of people here are aware that the law protects people against discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation. And even more worryingly, only 44% of LGB people questioned knew they were protected.”

Later this week, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency will publish the results of the largest LGB&T hate crime and discrimination survey ever conducted. Over 93,000 people from 27 member states took part and the Commission supported their work to recruit participants in Northern Ireland. Indications from this survey are that many LGB&T people across Europe cannot be themselves in their daily lives. Some have to hide their identity and live in isolation or fear. And others experience discrimination and even violence. The Commission expects that this survey will be highlighting the issue of under-reporting of LGB&T discrimination across Europe.

The Equality Commission receives over 3,000 queries a year from people who believe they've experienced unfair treatment. Only a very few (about 2.5% at best) concern sexual orientation and even fewer relate to gender identity.

Mr Wardlow commented, “We have already recognised the need to take special measures to address under-reporting of sexual orientation discrimination here in N Ireland. We recently launched a new suite of digital resources for the LGB community under the [SoMe brand – Sexual orientation More equality](#). A dedicated [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Youtube](#) presence has allowed us to engage in a different way with LGB people who may not be aware of what we do and how we can help them if they experience discrimination.

“The Commission is committed to ongoing direct engagement, outreach and partnership work to raise awareness of our services. We recognise the particular sensitivities around dealing with discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

“We know that we need to make particular efforts to reach out to LGBT individuals who may feel that they are totally alone and that they have no recourse against unfair treatment. These are the people who could really benefit from our staff's advice, support

and experience. And individuals can be reassured of receiving a confidential and supportive response when they seek our help.”