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PRESS RELEASE

Together Building a United Community: ECNI statement

Michael Wardlow, the Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission said today:

"The Commission welcomes the publication of the Together Building a United Community and will be studying the Strategy in detail and responding fully in due course.

"We have been briefed today (23 May 2013) on aspects of the associated delivery structures which include an enhanced role for the Equality Commission. We will be looking at the new functions proposed and will be seeking further engagement on these.

"The Equality Commission already has a statutory duty to provide advice to public authorities on their equality and good relations duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. We also have a role in promoting good race relations under the Race Relations Order 1997 and we have worked for many years to help employers provide good and harmonious work environments under the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998. We have always been conscious that the deep roots of division must be tackled at all levels and in all sectors of our society.

"We see the extension of the Commission's remit, as set out today, as reinforcement of the concept that equality of opportunity and good relations are interdependent and inextricably linked. The one cannot be effectively pursued without the other and neither will find its full expression in the absence of the other.

"It continues to be imperative to address key inequalities. But we also recognise that equality of opportunity is threatened where there are bad relationships between different

sectors of our community - and good relations will not be effectively achieved unless people are confident that they are being afforded equality of opportunity.

"We acknowledge the significant challenge that has been placed before us. We would like to use this opportunity to restate the Commission's commitment to delivery of all of our statutory functions, working alongside others who have achieved so much both in times of conflict and peace."

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/executive-statements/statement-090513-together-building.htm>