

**22 May 2014**

**Avoid language which increases fears says Equality Commissioner**

The Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission has stressed the importance of people in positions of influence in Northern Ireland avoiding language or behaviour which would increase the vulnerability and legitimate fears of people under threat of attack because of their race or religion.

“People will always have differences in faith and belief, and the right to freely express and debate those beliefs is a core value in our society,” Dr. Michael Wardlow said.

“But they must not, under the law, say anything which would incite or encourage racial or religious hatred. Investigations into potential breaches of that law are a matter for the police and the prosecution service.”

“Beyond that requirement of the criminal law, everyone should be very aware that people are already being subjected to violent and disgusting attacks by a prejudiced minority in this community simply because of a difference in religion or in their ethnic or national origin,” Dr. Wardlow said.

“We all have a responsibility to promote good relations in our community and to oppose such attacks. Everyone, and particularly those in a position to influence others, should make sure that there is nothing in their own language or behaviour which could be seen as encouragement by those carrying them out or increase the vulnerability and legitimate fears of those subjected to them.”

ENDS

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