

17/01/2014

PRESS RELEASE

Commission comment on Belfast race hate attacks

Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, has today called on the Northern Ireland Executive to consider specific measures to tackle prejudicial attitudes in our society, following attacks on three houses in the Sydenham area this week.

Condemning the attacks, which the PSNI have said they believe are part of a campaign targeting members of minority communities in the area, Dr. Wardlow said:

“Those who carried out these attacks do not represent the majority of people in our society. Those who choose to make their homes here make a significant contribution to our economy and culture and we should see their presence as a gift and not as a threat.

“The Commission will continue to advocate for a broader discussion on how we share this place.

“We know this is a major challenge. The Equality Commission’s most recent Equality Awareness Survey (2011) showed that 28% of those surveyed said they would mind having someone from Eastern Europe as a neighbour - an increase of 5 percentage points since the previous survey in 2008.

“This must be a matter of concern to all of us and the Equality Commission has recommended that, in its present revision of the Racial Equality Strategy, the Executive should and promote values of acceptance and respect. We have asked that action be taken to prioritise the reduction and elimination of racial violence, including actions to improve reporting of racist hate crimes and how racist hate crimes are addressed; and to reduce and prevent racist violence (including re-offending).”

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