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PRESS RELEASE

Settlement agreed by man asked to leave Belfast Youth Hostel

A French national of Algerian descent, who took a case alleging racial and religious discrimination against the Youth Hostel Association of Northern Ireland Limited, has settled his case for £2,000, with no admission of liability by the YHA.

Samir Chefai, who was supported in taking his case by the Equality Commission, has lived in Belfast for 16 years.

In March 2016, he visited his family in Paris, and left the keys to his Belfast home at his mother's house in Paris by mistake. While he was waiting for the keys to be sent back to him, he checked into the Belfast Youth Hostel for two nights and paid in advance.

On the second day of his stay he was in the lobby of the hostel, speaking on his mobile phone in French. A staff member approached him and asked him who he was. Mr Chefai replied that he was a guest, but when the staff member looked up his check in details, and saw that he had an address in Belfast, he said that he did not need to stay in the hostel. The staff member told him he should leave and contacted the police. Mr Chefai felt he had no option but to leave.

Mr Chefai says he was shocked, humiliated and embarrassed. "I was asked to leave the hostel, even though I had paid for a second night's stay. It felt to me as though assumptions were being made about my race and religion - that I was a Muslim of middle-eastern origin - and I was being asked to leave because of someone's opinion about me. Other people in the lobby could hear everything that was said which I found very embarrassing. I did eventually find another place to stay that night but only after some hours walking through Belfast. The whole experience was very unpleasant."

The Youth Hostel Association of Northern Ireland Ltd paid £2,000 to settle the case without admission of any liability. It has re-affirmed its commitment to the principle of equality of opportunity and will continue to ensure that it conforms to all relevant equality legislation, in particular the Race Relations Order. It had, of its own volition, already arranged for its staff to undertake training with the Equality Commission on a number of issues, and has now also agreed to liaise with the Commission on its policies, practices and procedures to ensure they are effective and conform to the requirements of the Race Relations Order (NI) 1997.

Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Dr Michael Wardlow, said: "This man, in a city where he had made his home for 16 years, was singled out, had his identity questioned in public, and was asked to leave the

hostel. It's completely unacceptable that anyone should be treated like this, and the experience was made worse for him because he felt that it was because of someone's perceptions about his religion and race.

"To challenge a person in a public place only because of presumptions about their race or religion would be simplistic stereotyping, which is unacceptable," Dr. Wardlow said. "The Equality Commission will give free and confidential advice to anyone who feels they may have been treated unfairly, and we can assist people to challenge discrimination in the courts and tribunals."