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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Judgement in race discrimination case against John Mulholland Motors**

A man of Chinese descent and his wife, a Hong Kong national, have been awarded £2,500 by the County Court sitting in Antrim after they claimed racial harassment while buying a car from John Mulholland Motors.

Kin Hung Wong and his wife Ms Law took the case under the Race Relations Order with the support of the Equality Commission.

Mr Wong works in IT and English is his first language. His wife's first language is Cantonese. He conducted this business with Mulholland's in English throughout.

The couple agreed to buy a car from Mulholland's but decided subsequently that the trade-in price was too low, they decided to sell their old car themselves following advice from the sales team. Mr Wong went back to John Mulholland Motors on the agreed date to collect their new car.

The price of the new car remained unchanged, but their balance payment was more because they were no longer trading their old car in. As it was a joint purchase and a large amount of money, to make sure she fully understood the change and what they were signing up to, Mr Wong discussed it with Ms Law in Cantonese. At this stage the couple were told several times by the sales staff to have their conversation in English. The couple alleged that the sales person believed incorrectly that Ms Law could understand the details if they were told to her in English, despite them explaining that she was unable to fully understand if they only used English to communicate.

Mr Wong found the way the sales staff dealt with them, asking them several times to speak only in English, was rude and aggressive, and he says there was no handshake upon completion of the deal.

In delivering his judgement, Judge Gilpin said that he was satisfied that the way the sales staff had dealt with the couple had 'created a degrading and humiliating environment'.

"I felt we were treated very badly and were disrespected by the company," said Mr Wong. "We were interrupted and told to speak English because we are in the UK. The atmosphere in which this transaction took place was strained and my wife was so distressed she was reduced to tears and no one apologised to her. I was unable

to make a complaint to Mulholland's on the day because nobody senior was available. So I'm glad that we won our case."

Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said: "The law says it is unlawful for a service provider to provide a service of a lower or worse standard to individuals on the grounds of their colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin."

"We recommend that service providers work to ensure that their premises are a welcoming and harmonious space for their workers and customers alike. Part of this would include allowing the Wongs to discuss their joint financial business as a couple in the language that suits them both, as the rest of the business was conducted in English by Mr Wong.

"The Commission also stresses that it is important to remember that in matters of service provision, employers may be held liable for the discriminatory impact of the actions of their staff. It's vital that they have equal opportunities policies in place and that all staff are familiar with them and know what is expected of them."