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PRESS RELEASE

Northern Ireland – What can we do about racism?

“All sectors of our society should be concerned about racism and make every effort to eradicate it. Racism is not acceptable and has no place in Northern Ireland in the 21st century,” says Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission.

“We need to listen to the voices of all those who feel disrespected and threatened, whatever their ethnicity and colour and take steps to ensure everyone who lives or visits here feels valued and safe. The Commission’s most recent equality awareness survey showed that all five of the most negatively viewed categories were racial groups. It is clear that there is significant work to be done to encourage positive attitudes to difference and to tackle prejudice and any institutional racism.”

Ms McGahey said: “The Executive’s Racial Equality Strategy has been in place since 2015 and has five more years to run. The Executive and departments need to progress the commitments already made in the Strategy. Now is the time to push ahead on actions to eliminate racism and racial discrimination, to tackle prejudicial attitudes and to reform the race equality laws so that people here have the same protection against racial discrimination as elsewhere in the UK.

“The Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted that data disaggregated by race to inform changes to law, policy or service provision is currently limited. We need better data on race, collected and kept separately so that we can identify and address inequalities in fields such as health and social care and also education, housing, employment and participation in public life.

“The Executive Office is charged with leading on this work. It needs to involve every part of Government to examine the changes needed to reduce racial inequalities and give clear timescales for actions. It will involve schools and agencies in education, criminal justice and housing for example. The inclusion of black and ethnic minority people in public life and local communities must be improved and more positive contacts encouraged between people of different races and ethnicities including in schools and workplaces.

“It is essential that we promote values of acceptance and respect for difference here and work together to ensure dignity and respect for people of all races and ethnic backgrounds.”