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Commissions meet EU officials on equality and human rights post Brexit

The Chief Commissioners of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) are meeting with EU officials, and elected representatives, in Brussels today at an event supported by the Northern Ireland Executive Office.

The Commissions will share experiences of their work to date as part of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework following UK withdrawal from the EU and the importance of maintaining equivalence on the island of Ireland regarding human rights and equality standards. They will also stress the importance of continued engagement and make recommendations as to how the EU can support the implementation of Article 2. This is the first event of its kind and the Commissions hope it will lead to ongoing and fruitful discussions.

As part of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework, the UK Government has committed to protect certain human rights and equality standards post Brexit in Northern Ireland. It requires 'no diminution' against certain EU standards and includes a duty to 'keep pace' with a number of EU equality directives. NIHRC and ECNI have been tasked under Article 2 with oversight of the UK Government commitment. They work in partnership with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to monitor and report on the relevant equality and human rights issues that have an island of Ireland dimension.

Speaking ahead of the event, the three Commissions, said:

"We welcome the opportunity to meet with officials in Brussels today on the importance of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework. There have been a number of very positive engagements between the Commissions and the European Commission over the last number of years in relation to our joint role under Article 2 and this week's event builds on this existing engagement.

"As we strive to uphold equality and human rights standards on the island of Ireland post-Brexit, the joint work of our three Commissions is more important now than ever. Prior to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, EU law played an important role in enhancing human rights and equality protections in Northern Ireland. Human rights and equality are still contentious in Northern Ireland and we lag behind Britain and Ireland in a number of areas. Therefore, the continued link to minimum EU standards as a result of Article 2, is very welcome.

"Going forward, we would encourage the European Commission to recognise the potential role it still has, through future EU law, to strengthen equality rights for

people here in Northern Ireland after Brexit. We would also welcome more structured and regular engagement with the European Commission and equality and human rights stakeholders in Northern Ireland including, women, minority ethnic people, migrant workers, border communities and disabled people.

“We look forward to continued working with our EU partners to ensure the protection of rights for all people on the island of Ireland.”