

DRAFT FINAL STRATEGY – MARCH 2004

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Racial Equality Strategy

Ministerial Foreword

Tackling the root causes of racial inequalities within Northern Ireland society will not be easy because many of the issues covered are difficult and complex. But, in the face of the mounting evidence of the inequalities encountered daily by members of our minority ethnic communities, to do nothing is not an option.

The Northern Ireland Executive recognised the need for action and committed itself to producing a cross-departmental strategy to tackle racial inequalities. Government is in a unique position to make a positive change to the lives of members of the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. A significant part of that change will be to ensure that all communities are treated equally.

A Strategy towards equality for Northern Ireland's minority ethnic communities, in a society that is equal, has respect for diversity and where there is a recognition that we are all interdependent on each other.

But we can do more across all the structures of government within Northern Ireland. The strategy set out in this document provides a framework for this action.

This is not just a Strategy for Government, but for everyone who has an interest in the future direction of Northern Ireland society. This Strategy provides a focus for all the social partners: Government, the Community & Voluntary, Business, Trade Unions, and the minority ethnic voluntary sector - all working together to effect change, for the benefit of all.

I recognise that it is essential that community and voluntary organisations, especially those representing the minority ethnic communities, continue to play an integral part in the implementation of the strategy. This can be effectively taken forward through the NI Forum for Racial Equality which includes representatives from both the statutory and community & voluntary sectors. The Forum will have a vital role in overseeing the implementation of the strategy through the associated action plan as well as monitoring and reviewing progress.

I commend this strategy to you and believe that the successful implementation of the actions outlined within the strategy will move us substantially in the direction we need to take as a society if we are to achieve our vision of a Northern Ireland in which racial diversity is valued and respected, where racism is not tolerated and where we can all live together and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection.

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The Northern Ireland Executive recognised the need for action and committed itself to producing a cross-departmental strategy to tackle racial inequalities. Government is in a unique position to make a positive change to the lives of members of the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. A significant start has already been made with the setting up of a Racial Equality Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. A fund has also been created to support the work of minority ethnic voluntary organisations and projects to promote good relations between people of different ethnic groups.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

1.1 In its Programme for Government the Northern Ireland Executive set out a vision for a wider community in which all citizens can fully and freely participate. A community where equality, human rights, mutual trust and respect must be core values and where citizens must be able to realise their full potential and live free from poverty¹.

1.2 To this end, the Programme for Government 2002-2005 undertook to *"bring forward a cross-departmental strategy to tackle racial inequalities, with subsequent implementation"*².

1.3 Tackling the problems that lead to the social exclusion of people from the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland is not just a moral imperative; it is also a social, economic and cultural one. People from minority ethnic communities make a vital contribution to the public, economic, social and cultural life of Northern Ireland.

1.4 For more than thirty years Northern Ireland has been more or less isolated by the troubles from wider demographic changes taking place across Europe. With the establishment of peace, and its consolidation, Northern Ireland will become an increasingly attractive place to settle and work, especially with the advent of EU enlargement in May 2004, and we must position ourselves to maximise the benefits of this for our economy and be prepared to become an increasingly more diverse and multi-cultural society.

A Shared Future

1.5 The Racial Equality strategy and its over arching vision will complement the vision articulated within the "Shared Future" consultation paper of a Northern Ireland society where there is equality, respect for diversity and a recognition that we are interdependent on each other. The Racial Equality Strategy is consistent with Northern Ireland Government's commitment to put in place strategies aimed at improving relations between all of Northern Ireland's communities. Flowing from the "Shared Future" consultation, a new cross-Departmental strategy and framework will be introduced to promote better relationships between and within communities in Northern Ireland, and to ensure that effective and co-ordinated responses to racial and sectarian intimidation are made. The strategic move of the Racial Equality Unit into the Good Relations and Reconciliation Division within OFMDFM will ensure that there is a co-ordinated and joined-up approach to implementation of actions arising out of both the Racial Equality and Good relations strategies.

Minority Ethnic Communities in Northern Ireland

The size and diversity of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland

1.6 The 2001 Census, which included a question on ethnicity, provides the first details of the current size and make up of the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland³. The Census also reveals the diversity of the minority ethnic population. As well as the Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Irish Traveller communities, there are people from the following ethnic backgrounds: Vietnamese, Bangladeshi, Latin- American, Jewish, African, Portuguese, Filipino and South Korean. There are also a significant number of refugees and asylum-seekers as well as migrant workers from many countries living and working here.

Key issues affecting minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland

Multiple identity / discrimination

1.7 Everyone one has an identity which is multiple, and which changes throughout their lifetime – we have differing ethnicity but are also young / older, disabled, man / woman, gay / lesbian etc. This means that we will experience policy differently at different times of our lives and depending upon the circumstances we are in.

1.8 As a consequence of having multiple identities it is true to say that people may therefore experience multiple discrimination. The successful implementation of this strategy in achieving equality for people from minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland, will not eliminate the possibility that people from minority ethnic backgrounds will not still experience discrimination on grounds of such things as gender, disability, sexual orientation or age.

1.9 Where an inequality relates primarily to a person's gender the action to tackle the inequality will be more likely to fall under a Gender Equality Strategy. Inequalities relating to older age will be more likely to be addressed by a strategy for older people. The Commissioner for Children and Young People will safeguard and promote the rights of children and young persons in Northern Ireland. All of these will have a direct and indirect impact on people from minority ethnic backgrounds who also fall within the remit of each of these strategies.

1.10 The strategy for racial equality while focusing very directly on issues which have a direct impact on people from minority ethnic backgrounds will be implemented with due cognisance of all other existing and emerging strategies and EU Directives dealing with such areas as children and young people, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and so on.

Institutional racism

1.11 The phrase "institutional racism" has been the subject of much debate. The fact is that the concept of institutional racism exists and is generally accepted, even if a long trawl through the work of academics and activists produces varied words and phrases in pursuit of a definition. There has not been to date a universally agreed definition of exactly what is meant by the phrase, however the following are two of the most frequently quoted attempts at a comprehensive definition.

"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people."

The Macpherson Report

"If racist consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs or practices, that institution is racist whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racial intentions"

The Commission for Racial Equality.

1.12 This strategy whilst not dealing with any instance of institutional racism in Northern Ireland, does accept that institutional racism can develop, and can already be, in organisations. Through the development, and continuous monitoring, review and assessment of actions within the implementation action plan associated with this strategy, Departments and Agencies in Northern Ireland will be in a strong position to continuously review practice and policy in the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland, which will act as the most robust protection against any development of institutional racism in any NI Department or Agency.

1.13 The damage done by even the occasional display of racial prejudice is incalculable. Therefore, training and awareness initiatives for public servants, in particular those in the frontline of service delivery, will focus primarily on eliminating the potential for incidents of "unwitting", "unconscious" or "unintentional" racism.

1.14 There is significant diversity of needs and problems both across and within minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. However, there has been a growing amount of research undertaken in recent years about common issues and problems faced by the main minority ethnic communities. This has led to a growing recognition of the social exclusion, disadvantaged position and racism⁴ experienced by people of minority ethnic backgrounds. There is also a recognition of the need for capacity building measures and resources required to enable minority ethnic people to participate in public, economic, social and cultural life.

1.15 Dr Paul Connolly's report "'Race' and Racism in Northern Ireland: A Review of the Research Evidence"⁵ provides a comprehensive and accessible overview of the research evidence. While the report acknowledges that much research still needs to be done, it concludes, "the increasing evidence clearly highlights the reality of racism in Northern Ireland and some of the key problems faced by minority ethnic people". It identifies two over-arching challenges facing policy makers and service providers:

- *The need for different Departments, agencies and other bodies and voluntary organisations to work together in new and imaginative ways to begin to address the problems faced by minority ethnic people; and*
- *The need for all service providers to 'mainstream' racial equality issues within their particular areas of responsibility. This includes the establishment of effective monitoring and consultation systems to ensure that Racial equality is given due consideration in all aspects of service development and provision.*⁶

Main issues affecting members of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland.

1.16 The review of research evidence identifies five particular "cross-cutting"⁷ issues that disproportionately affect the minority ethnic population. These issues will be addressed through initiatives within the implementation action plan. They are:

The language barrier – a proportion of people from minority ethnic communities, and many migrant workers, do not have English as a first language. Poor or no English causes particular problems for these people in relation to access to services such as health, education and training and employment.

Lack of information – there is a lack of information accessible to minority ethnic people about the services that are available to them or to which they are entitled.

Training needs of staff – lack of understanding or cultural sensitivity among public sector staff of the needs of minority ethnic people when trying to access public services.

The cultural needs of minority ethnic people – the need within public services (for example, hospitals, schools etc.) to recognise and provide for the basic cultural needs of minority ethnic people, especially in terms of catering for diet and religious observance.

Racial prejudice and racist harassment; - PRINCIPLES AND AIMS

1.17 Racial prejudice - there is a significant degree of ignorance and lack of understanding in Northern Ireland about the needs and concerns of minority ethnic people as well as a worrying level of prejudice against communities and individuals. These attitudes have all too often been reinforced by the media. There are significantly more negative attitudes towards Travellers than any other minority ethnic group⁸. This prejudice and lack of understanding has, increasingly, translated into people's behaviour.

1.18 Racist Harassment - for many people from minority ethnic communities racist harassment is a persistent factor in their life in Northern Ireland. Incidents have been reported involving men, women, children and the elderly. Incidents have been reported in rural areas as well as cities, in the home, place of work, the street, in bars and in leisure centres. Incidents occur throughout the year and at all times of the day and night⁹. Racist harassment, from name calling through to physical assault, reminds minority ethnic people that they are excluded from aspects of wider Northern Ireland society and reinforces that exclusion. It can act as a strong deterrent to many minority ethnic people in applying for certain jobs, choosing to live in certain areas and making use of social and health care services. It can restrict the type of social activities people can engage in and can make people prisoners in their own home. It is essential that we acknowledge the level of racism and racial harassment in Northern Ireland society and act to combat it.

2.4 Only if we are confident in our rights and responsibilities, only if we create security for the individual from poverty and communities from disadvantage, only if we can help the confidence of a community to express its needs can we build a firm foundation for tackling the divisions in our society. In short we must create a feeling of justice for all, and ensure that there can be real inclusion of all individuals before we can fully secure a cohesive society.

2.5 Regeneration of our society - in the fullest sense - means that we have to tackle all these issues at the same time. This involves responsibilities as well as rights. This will not be achieved overnight.

2.6 In tackling these issues, we have the advantage of a vibrant and extensive community and voluntary sector which already makes significant and critical contributions to many areas of life. A key challenge will be to build on this community capacity and to involve it in policies and programmes aimed at strengthening our community well-being.

2.7 In achieving our objectives we are committed to partnership working.

RACIAL EQUALITY STRATEGY; VISION, PRINCIPLES AND AIMS.

GROWING AS A COMMUNITY

2.1 The Northern Ireland Government has committed itself through the Programme for Government to building a cohesive, inclusive and just society. In doing this it is accepted that Government and society must together address a range of hard issues, prominent amongst these being racism and sectarianism. The inequalities and divisions, which are evident in our society, will only disappear if there are consistent, focused and effective policies to tackle them.

2.2 The Programme for Government focuses Government policy on:

- the promotion of equality and human rights;
- tackling poverty and social disadvantage;
- the renewal of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods;
- sustaining and enhancing local communities, particularly in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas; and
- improving community relations and tackling the divisions in our society.

2.3 Each of these policy areas is important in its own right. But as a Government we believe that we need to see the linkages between all these issues and seek to develop a wider approach to help make a real change in our society.

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2.7 In achieving our objectives we are committed to partnership working.

As a Government, we will ensure the full implementation of our statutory obligations on equality of opportunity and human rights.

2.8 The protection of human rights and the promotion of equality of opportunity are central to the Belfast Agreement. These policies are prerequisites for improving community relations and building community capacity, particularly in areas of greatest need.

2.9 We recognise also the importance of ensuring that key public services, including health and social services, social security, education and employment services, respect and cater effectively for the needs of different users, including those of different community or ethnic background and social class and those with disabilities, literacy difficulties, or whose first language is not English. We will also work for the advancement of women in public life.

2.10 It is in this context that the Racial Equality Strategy has been developed, and will be implemented. The Vision articulated within this strategy and the actions arising from it will produce tangible progress towards the Government's Vision for Northern Ireland.

Vision

2.11 Central to the delivery of the Racial Equality Strategy is the following vision:

A community in which racial diversity is valued and respected, where racism is not tolerated and where we can all live together and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection.

Principles

2.12 Underpinning the Racial Equality Strategy will be a set of principles that will influence all the steps taken in delivering the strategy. All Departments, agencies and other relevant organisations will:

- respect and respond appropriately to the needs of people from minority ethnic communities, as identified and articulated by these communities;
- recognise diversity within minority ethnic communities in terms of, for example, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious observance and life choices, and take account of it;
- identify and recognise the needs of individuals and avoid stereotyping on the basis of group characteristics;
- plan to take account of need, and respond flexibly to identified need;
- promote a partnership approach in which Departments, agencies, statutory bodies and voluntary organisations can work productively together;

- target efforts and available resources towards those in greatest social need;
- strengthen and build on the work which Departments are taking forward in the context of the obligations placed on them by section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and
- recognise the need for meaningful, 'culturally appropriate', consultation with the minority ethnic sector.

Aims

2.13 Taking account of the research evidence, we have identified seven shared aims which point the strategic direction for Departments, agencies and other organisations, working individually and together, to make a significant difference to the lives of people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

- To eliminate racism, racial inequality and racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for people of different ethnic backgrounds in Northern Ireland.
- To increase equality of opportunity for minority ethnic people in accessing and benefiting from public services, including training, education housing and employment opportunities.
- To combat racism and provide protection against racist crime.
- To promote good relations and mutual respect between people of different ethnic backgrounds, including Irish Travellers.
- To increase awareness and understanding of and respect for, the different minority ethnic groups within Northern Ireland and their cultures and traditions.
- To increase participation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in public, economic, social and cultural life.
- To build capacity within minority ethnic communities to develop a vibrant, independent and sustainable minority ethnic voluntary sector at both local and regional level and to help minority ethnic people to contribute to achieving the strategic aims set out in this Strategy.

Each of these aims is commented on in greater detail as follows;

2.14 To eliminate racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for people of different ethnic backgrounds in Northern Ireland.

The strategic aim is in line with the developing legislative framework. This strategy would propose that the needs of minority ethnic communities should *always* be taken account of. It also proposes that policies and practices should be designed to address the identified needs of minority ethnic people in a strategic manner across the administration.

2.15 To increase equality of opportunity for minority ethnic people in accessing and benefiting from public services, including training, education and employment opportunities.

If minority ethnic people are to play a full part in our society, it is essential that they should have access to all public services, including health, education and training and employment. Services do not always respond appropriately to all the needs of people from minority ethnic backgrounds. They may not know about their entitlement to services. They may have difficulty in understanding what is said or written to them, or in saying what they require. They may be forced to rely on their children or others to act as interpreters. They may find that health, education and other services do not take account of their cultural or religious needs. They may find that public sector staff do not have the knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting minority ethnic people. This strategy should be a way of ensuring that structures and services are flexible enough to respond to the needs of minority ethnic people.

2.16 To combat racism and provide protection against racist crime.

The Northern Ireland Office remains responsible for criminal law and enforcement in Northern Ireland. On 5 November 2002 the Northern Ireland Office launched a public consultation on race crime and sectarian crime legislation. The consultative paper, which has been made available in certain minority languages, describes the legislative background in Northern Ireland and in England and Wales and sets out four options for legislative change.¹⁰ There are also issues surrounding relationships between minority ethnic community members and the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the confidence that minority ethnic community members have in the Police Service.

2.17 To promote good relations and mutual respect between people of different ethnic backgrounds, including Irish Travellers.

Northern Ireland community relations policy has tended to focus on relations between the two main communities within Northern Ireland. The need to develop good relations between the majority communities and minority ethnic communities has tended to be overlooked. There are particular difficulties with

relations between the Travellers and the settled community. Where diversity is recognised and valued there can be a sense of shared belonging and identity for all. Where it is ignored there is misunderstanding and mistrust leading to exclusion. This undermines people's sense of belonging and their capacity to contribute.

2.18 To increase awareness and understanding of and respect for, the different minority ethnic groups within Northern Ireland and their cultures and traditions.

Increasing awareness and respect for our ethnic and cultural diversity has two related dimensions, increasing awareness and respect within the Northern Ireland community and also ensuring that Northern Ireland service providers understand and address diverse needs.

2.19 To increase participation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in social, public, economic and cultural life.

There is a need to look at all available opportunities for people from minority ethnic backgrounds to play as full a part as possible in all walks of life. This may involve outreach initiatives and devising new and innovative ways of engaging with people and involving them. Government must act in an enabling role, helping to develop the potential for greater participation and engagement while simultaneously promoting and where appropriate, providing opportunities for minority ethnic people to be fully involved in civil society.

2.20 To build capacity within minority ethnic communities to develop a vibrant, independent and sustainable minority ethnic voluntary sector at both local and regional level and to help minority ethnic people to contribute to achieving the strategic aims set out in this Strategy.

There is a recognition of the social exclusion, disadvantaged position and racism experienced by people of minority ethnic backgrounds. There is also a recognition of the need for capacity building measures and resources required to enable minority ethnic people to participate in public, economic, social and cultural life. However this is not just or even primarily about the provision of funding. It includes aspects of training and organisational and personal development and resource building. It may also involve working with communities to develop the capacity of members of those communities to help themselves.