



Tony Canavan
Civic Forum Review Team
5th Floor
Lesley House
25 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6GD

29 August 2008

Dear Tony

Concordia is the social partners' organisation for Northern Ireland, bringing together ICTU, CBI, UFU and NICVA. Its aim is to drive forward social and economic development for the benefit of the whole community in Northern Ireland. Concordia has been in existence since 1995, having initially come together through a loose arrangement on the development of Peace I. The social partners have subsequently acted together on a range of issues to provide a stronger, more united voice for civil society in Northern Ireland.

In addition to this common position, the individual organisations will each be making more detailed responses to the consultation.

We welcome this opportunity to put forward our views on the review of the Civic Forum, having served as nominating bodies under the previous arrangement.

If there is to be a new Civic Forum we would recommend that:

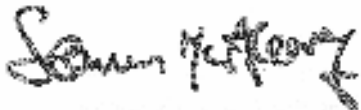
- 1) The body should be constituted along social partnership lines with equal representation from employer, trade union, agricultural/rural and voluntary and community sector interests.
- 2) The number of members of the body should be reduced to approximately 25 people. In addition to core membership it could establish sub-committees to take forward specific pieces of work if necessary. The membership of the previous Civic Forum was too large and unwieldy to enable effective operation.
- 3) The new body, before it begins to operate, should have a very clear remit and focus as to its role and tasks and this should not duplicate the functions of other bodies. This must be meaningful and add

something of value to the governance and quality of decision making in Northern Ireland, otherwise it will waste the time and resources of those involved.

- 4) It should under no circumstances function as a second chamber to the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 5) The new body, before it begins to operate, should have clear relationships set down with the First and Deputy First Ministers, the NI Executive and the Assembly to ensure that any advice, ideas and evidence it puts forward will be understood and considered appropriately.
- 6) It must be adequately resourced to carry out its agreed remit, including having a modest research budget.

The partners in Concordia now have over 13 years' experience in identifying and agreeing positions on issues of common concern. We recognise the value of learning from the positions and experience of other sectors and of robust debate and deliberation to reach consensus and increase understanding of complex issues. Any new Civic Forum should seek to learn these lessons through a social dialogue structure.

Yours sincerely



Seamus McAleavey, NICVA

On behalf of:
Peter Bunting, NIC-ICTU
Clarke Black, UFU
Nigel Smyth, CBI