

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

A Racial Equality Strategy in Northern Ireland

The Minister of State for Northern Ireland (Lord Rooker): This statement sets out how I intend to take forward a Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland.

This statement is all the more timely following the appalling attacks in London of 7 July. These attacks were an attack on all of us. The bombs didn't discriminate and people of all faiths and none and people of all racial groups have been victims. At this time, we should remember that communities in the United Kingdom have more that unites them than divides them.

Government is determined that the atrocities will not be allowed to create tension between our communities. The Good Relations Policy and Strategic Framework, with its vision of a shared and inclusive society, which was published on 21 March 2005 and the Racial Equality Strategy provide solid foundations for a future shared between and within the communities of Northern Ireland - both old and new. They provide a sound basis for a society where relationships are rooted in mutual recognition and trust.

The Government's vision for Northern Ireland is of a society in which racial diversity is supported, understood, valued and respected: a society where racism in any of its forms is not tolerated and where we live together as a society and enjoy equality of opportunity and equal protection.

The publication of the strategy today sets a framework for Government and all sections of civil society in Northern Ireland to contribute to achieving that vision. The framework will allow us

- to tackle racial inequalities in Northern Ireland and to open up opportunity for all;
- to eradicate racism and hate crime; and
- together with A Shared Future – Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland, to initiate actions to promote good race relations.

It sets out six shared aims that will point the strategic direction for action by Departments, agencies and wider society, working individually and together, to make a significant difference to the lives of people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The aims of the strategy are: eliminating racism, equality of protection; equality of service provision; participation; dialogue and capacity building.

The strategy will be taken forward through an action plan that will be developed by the Government in collaboration with the Racial Equality Forum.

Government will lead by example. It will set the pace to promote racial equality through a strong public policy agenda. Ultimately, however, sustained and deeper progress depends on political stability. It will require leadership at political, civic and community levels.

Copies of the Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland have been placed in the Libraries of the House and are also available on the website

www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/raceequality