

A Shared Future

Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland

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Office of the
**First Minister and
Deputy First Minister**

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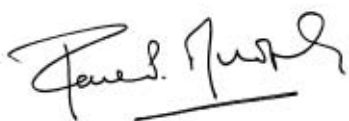
Foreword

The Government's vision for the future of Northern Ireland is for a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of human rights for all. It will be founded on partnership, equality and mutual respect as a basis of good relationships.

The essence of reconciliation is about moving away from relationships that are built on mistrust and defence to relationships rooted in mutual recognition and trust. Where relationships have been shaped by threat and fear over a long period we must make changes. We must make those changes through policy and law to address that threat and fear. In my view the absence of trust will set back both economic and social development; we will fail to realise the talents of our more diverse society.

This policy document sets out that we need to establish over time a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance: a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where violence is an illegitimate means to resolve differences, but where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere and where all people are treated impartially.

I am pleased to present the Government's Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland. Through *A Shared Future* many of you took the opportunity to tell us that retaining the 'status quo' was not an option. This has been a long process, but slow progress should not be mistaken for standing still. Many steps have been taken along the way and the publication of this document is most definitely not the end point. The fundamental principles and aims of this document will begin to underpin how we all, Government, political representatives, local authorities, civic society, can work together to bring about a shared future for all of us in Northern Ireland.



The Right Honourable Paul Murphy MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Introduction

Good community relations policy, and its outworking, is the search for the practical foundations of trust between all people in Northern Ireland who have been divided on the basis of perceived political, cultural, religious, class or ethnic background.

The division that perpetuates in Northern Ireland is costly both socially and economically. Adapting public policy in Northern Ireland simply to cope with community division holds out no prospect of stability or sustainability in the long run.

Over recent years the economic performance of Northern Ireland has shown significant improvement. With increasing economic progress we have seen the workforce in Northern Ireland change: it has become more diverse, drawing in much needed skilled workers to support important public services and local companies. Some companies depend on these workers to continue their business in Northern Ireland.

However, a small minority in Northern Ireland society have subjected migrant workers to racially motivated intimidation and violence. Such behaviour is unacceptable. Vulnerable groups and individuals will be protected from those who cannot accept their responsibility for the maintenance of good community relations and persist in abusive and violent behaviour.

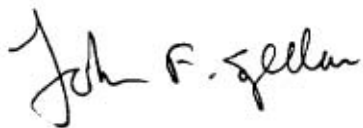
Good relations must be based on partnership, equality and mutual respect. It cannot be built on unequal foundations. It must be built upon the significant progress that has been achieved to deliver equality of opportunity right across Northern Ireland.

Public authorities already have a statutory duty under Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The new policy and strategic framework will provide a mechanism through which departments can more effectively mainstream good relations considerations into policy development. It will be complemented by the Northern Ireland Racial Equality Strategy. And of course the Equality Commission will have an important role to play in continuing to advise public authorities and others on this important duty.

This Good Relations Policy and Strategic Framework, with its vision of a shared and inclusive society, is not an aspiration or a pipe dream. A future shared between and within the communities of Northern Ireland (both old and new) is a reality. It was clear from the *Shared Future* consultation that there is overwhelming support for a shared and inclusive society.

This document outlines how the illustrative practical steps and actions, based on common fundamental principles, can be co-ordinated across government and throughout civic society to ensure an effective and coherent response to sectarian and racial intimidation with the aim of building relationships rooted in mutual recognition and trust. These will be developed into detailed actions in the first triennial action plan that I will publish in Autumn 2005.

Finally, while the Government will lead and co-ordinate actions flowing from this policy and strategic framework, it will be incumbent on every individual and organisation in Northern Ireland to play their part to promote a shared Northern Ireland. Civic society has already shown us that it is prepared to stand up and be counted as we have recently seen with the **'One Small Step'** campaign to **'Live Life without Barriers'**. It is now time for the rest of us to do the same.



The Right Honourable John Spellar MP
Minister of State for Northern Ireland

Part 2

Towards a shared society

Summary

- achieving a shared society – shared education, housing, services and communities
- tackling the visible manifestations of sectarianism and racism
- reclaiming shared space
- reducing tension at interface areas
- supporting good relations through cultural diversity
- continuing to develop shared workplaces
- the important linkage between community development and community relations
- rewarding good behaviour and penalising bad behaviour

