

CHARTER OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND WORKING FOR A NON-RACIST SOCIETY

WE, THE DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PARTIES OF NORTHERN IRELAND, **Having regard** to the international human rights instruments signed and ratified by the British Government, in particular to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Having regard to Article 1 of this Convention, which defines racial discrimination as "... any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life ..."

Having regard to Article 4 of this Convention which, which requires all governments and, by implication, the Northern Ireland Executive, to condemn and to declare an offence punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin, and also the provision of any assistance to racist activities, including the financing thereof. It further provides that public authorities or public institutions, national or local, shall not promote or incite racial discrimination.

Having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights and in particular Article 10 on the right to free speech, Article 14 on non-discrimination, and Article 17 prohibiting the abuse of rights.

Mindful that according to these same international human rights instruments one's political freedoms are vitally important to any democracy but they are not absolute given the equally fundamental right to be protected against racial discrimination; accordingly, political freedoms must not be allowed to be abused to exploit, cause or initiate prejudice on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin or nationality or for the purpose of seeking to gain the sympathy of the electorate.

Being aware of the special tasks and responsibilities of political parties as actors in a democratic political process, defending, articulating and bearing witness to the basic principles of a democratic society; providing a platform for discussion on issues where there may be differences of opinion, integrating different views into the process of political decision making, thereby enabling society to solve conflicts of interest and opinion between various social groups through dialogue rather than through social exclusion and conflict; and selecting representatives at various levels for active participation in the political process.

Convinced that the free exercise of one's political rights can and must go

hand in hand with firmly upholding the principle of non-discrimination and is inherent in the democratic process itself.

Being convinced furthermore that representation of ethnic minority groups in the political process is properly an integral part of the democratic process, since political parties are or should strive to be a reflection of society.

COMMIT OURSELVES TO ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE:

- **To defend** basic human rights and democratic principles and to reject all forms of racist violence, incitement to racial hatred and harassment, and any form of racial discrimination.
- **To refuse** to display, to publish or to have published, to distribute or to endorse in any way views and positions which stir up or invite, or may reasonably be expected to stir up or to invite prejudice, hostility or division between people of different ethnic or national origins or religious beliefs, and to deal firmly with any racist sentiments and behaviour within its own ranks.
- **To deal responsibly and fairly** with sensitive topics relating to such groups and to avoid their stigmatisation.
- **To refrain from** any form of political alliance or cooperation at any level with any political party which incites or attempts to stir up racial or ethnic prejudices and racial hatred.
- **To strive for** the fair representation of the above mentioned groups at all levels of the parties, noting the special responsibility of the party leadership to stimulate and support the recruitment of candidates from these groups for political functions as well as membership.

And further pledge to take appropriate action to ensure that all persons who work for or associate themselves in any way with any of our election campaigns or other activities will be **made** aware of and **required** at all times to act in accordance with the above principles.