



**PRESS STATEMENT**  
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**NO EMBARGO**

**NI Women's Coalition calls for Civic Chamber**

As part of its negotiating package, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition is calling for a Civic Forum to work alongside the new Northern Ireland Assembly, as a second chamber.

"Politics is not just for politicians," said Kate Fearon, a member of the Women's Coalition negotiating team for Strand 1. "We see the civic chamber as a way of broadening and deepening democracy."

"There are many people in Northern Ireland who could bring a wealth of ideas and expertise to politics. They have stayed away from mainstream politics because they don't see it as a place where their issues get addressed." She added that certain groups, including women and young people, are especially marginalised.

"We would all benefit from a civic chamber," Ms. Fearon continued, stating that it would bring a broad set of interests and expertise directly into the political realm by advising the new Assembly on policy matters.

The Women's Coalition proposes that the Civic Forum consist of a set of panels, including the categories of Culture and Education; Youth Affairs; Labour; Community Representation; Administrative and Social Concerns; and an Industrial and Commercial panel. Organisations would register as member groups under the panel most relevant to their concerns. Representatives would be elected from those registered under the panels, to safeguard against the second chamber becoming a vehicle for partisan appointments.

"We want to see the day when politics is no longer dominated by narrow constitutional positions. People should be able to pursue other agendas in the political mainstream," she went on.

"The challenge we face is that many other parties seem to have a somewhat crude notion of democracy – one that starts and ends with an electoral mandate. We are interested in fostering a more active citizenship and involving as many people as possible in democratic life," she concluded. "With the Talks set to wind up by April 9, we are looking for support for this goal both inside and outside the negotiating chamber."

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