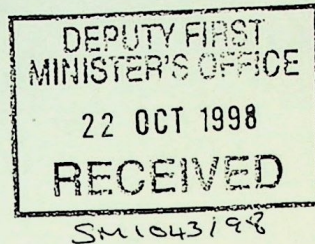


# NICEM

FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

15 October 1998

Mr. Seamus Mallon  
The Deputy First Minister  
Northern Ireland Assembly  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4



Dear Mr. Mallon

**Re : Civic Forum**

NICEM is an umbrella body of ethnic minority groups which represents the Chinese, Travellers, Indian, Pakistani, Muslim, African-Caribbean and Filipino communities in Northern Ireland. NICEM represents the interests of ethnic minorities and is a forum to promote participation. In pursuit of justice, equality and dignity, NICEM works for social change in relation to race relations and in particular to the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.

We register our interests in the Forum and request that there should be representation from our Council to the Forum. I enclose our submission on the Civic Forum for your information. I also enclose our latest publication for your information in order to let you understand more about our organisation and works.

We would like to meet you to discuss more about the ethnic minority issues. I do hope that you can come to open our Conference on "Human Rights and Racial Equality" from my previous invitation.

Best wishes !

Patrick Yu  
Executive Director

working together against racism

**NORTHERN IRELAND COUNCIL**  
**FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES**

Submission to the Deputy First Minister  
For consideration of the proposal for  
The Civic Forum

15 October 1998

## 1. Introduction

NICEM welcomes the Good Friday Agreement that provides for the establishment of a consultative Civic Forum (para. 34, p.9). It will create new forms of participation for the civil society in Northern Ireland. There are three key elements that govern the operation of the Forum. They are :

- **inclusive** - the Forum must be inclusive which can broadly reflect different spectrum and interests of the society;
- **Consensual** - building a consensus, taking a pragmatic approach, working with the grain, confident within its area of responsibility; and
- **Influential** - capable of influencing policy formulation and decision making in a range of public and private sector organisations.

## 2. Timing

The Forum should become operational from the date of full devolution, when the new Assembly formally comes into being.

## 3. Role of the Forum

- 3.1 The Forum is a consultative body that should have no formal legislative, executive or administrative powers. It is pure on advisory capacity for the Northern Ireland Assembly on all major policy issues. It has the rights to be consulted by the Northern Ireland Assembly on all major policies.
- 3.2 The Forum should monitor the development and implementation of all policies in Northern Ireland.
- 3.3 The Forum should address and improve the quality of decision-making in public life.
- 3.4 The Forum should stimulate public debate in a non-partisan manner and seriously influence the political agenda and direction of Northern Ireland.
- 3.5 The Forum has the ability to initiate debate on any policy relevant to the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 3.6 The Forum has the ability to initiate its own investigations and reports as well as commenting on and analysing long-term strategic policies.
- 3.7 The Forum prepares proposals for consideration by the Northern Ireland Assembly and by other public, private or voluntary sector bodies.

3.8 The Forum produce an annual report its activities for consideration by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

#### **4. Membership**

4.1 The Forum will be composed of representatives from the breadth of civic society, from those engage in the key sectors of national life and from those in distinctive social interest groupings.

4.2 We do not propose an exact figure for the members of the Forum. The basic principle is that it must be inclusive, in particular those minority rights groups.

4.3 We propose members could be drawn form the following key sectors :

- Voluntary and Community
- Trade Unions and employees groups
- Business and the professions
- Women's groups
- Ethnic minority groups
- Youth groups
- Groups representing the disabled
- Groups representing gay and lesbian
- Groups representing the elderly
- Academics
- Religious groups representing all faiths
- Environmental groups
- Agricultural industry groups

4.4 Each sector has the right to nominate their own representatives.

#### **5. Meetings**

5.1 The Forum might meet on a monthly basis in plenary session under a Chair elected at the inaugural meeting.

5.2 The Forum should set up standing committee on various policy issues and invite other non-Forum members to make contribution at working group or sub-committee system.

#### **6. Staffing and Resources**

6.1 As with existing experience on local partnerships a great deal of the work would be carried out by the members of the Forum. The combined resources of all the potential partners would be a considerable asset available to the Forum.

6.2 However a small number of dedicated staff would be required to service the Forum and its working groups as well as to provide some policy support. It is suggested to have up to 8 staff (four on support side and the other four on policy side) in order to set up the Secretariat of the Forum.

6.3 All the posts of the Secretariat must be opened to apply. Secondment from other sectors with relevant policy expertise must be considered by the Forum.

6.4 The First and Deputy First Minister must provide adequate resources for the operation of the Forum in accordance with the Agreement, including running costs, staff salary, research and development, remuneration of the Forum members, etc.

## **7. Accommodation**

7.1 The First and Deputy First Minister must provide accommodation arrangement for the Forum.