

15 October 1998

Rt Hon David Trimble
First Minister Designate
Northern Ireland Assembly
Room 2
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST




Fair Play
for Women

Dear David

Fair Play is an initiative to encourage women to realise their full potential and to contribute fully to the public and economic life of Northern Ireland. It has been involved in a number of ventures to promote the position of women in society by raising awareness, promoting role models and building confidence levels amongst women.

Fair Play recognises the significant opportunity for positive change and a genuinely more inclusive society in Northern Ireland offered by the Belfast Agreement. It has serious reservations that the Government's proposals for a unified Equality Commission will run the real risk of marginalising gender issues, but it recognises the potential of other bodies set up under the Agreement to effect positive change. In particular, it welcomes the proposals to establish a consultative Civic Forum and would wish to ensure that it is fully representative of women and groups representing their interests.

Since I understand that in accordance with clause 64 of the Bill you – along with the Deputy First Minister – will have responsibility for establishing guidelines for the selection of members of the Civic Forum, I would encourage you to ensure appropriate representation of women. As you are aware participation rates for women on public bodies are low: only one third of those serving on public bodies are women, only 13% of local councillors are women and indeed only 14 members of the new Assembly are women. Clearly the membership of the Civic Forum should be carefully constituted to ensure that these levels of under-representation are not replicated.

Fair Play would be pleased to provide advice on how fair representation of women's issues might be secured, if this proved helpful. I look forward to hearing your proposals for the new Civic Forum.

Yours sincerely

87 MAY BLOOD
Chair, Fair Play Northern Ireland