

PRESS RELEASE

8 NOVEMBER 2006

EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE NORTHERN IRELAND EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER EQUALITY LEGISLATION

Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland today expressed concern that the Government intends to quickly introduce legislation following its *Getting Equal* consultation in Northern Ireland, despite plans to delay introduction of similar proposals in England and Wales.

Proposed by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister the plans to outlaw discrimination on ground of sexual orientation in the provision of goods, services and facilities, have the potential to penalise churches and other Christian groups wishing to uphold the beliefs of their faith.

Many churches and other Christian organisations provide a variety of services to the community whether that be allowing outside services to use premises for their work, provision of luncheon clubs to the elderly, youth work, or parent and toddler groups. They could find themselves in a position of feeling they have no alternative but to withdraw such services to the community which no one wishes to see happen.

Commenting on the *Getting Equal* proposals, Stephen Cave General Secretary of Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland said,

'We are concerned that in seeking to *outlaw* discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation the Government will actually *require* discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief. While the Department has given assurances that there will be appropriate exemptions for religious organisations, we understand that these may well be limited to practices relating to the basic doctrines of a faith. Do the courts really want to be deciding key doctrinal positions on behalf of the church?'

OFMDFM intends to lay the regulations before Parliament by the end of the year. Responding to news of a delay in the introduction of the proposals to England and Wales until April 2007 Karen Jardine, Public Affairs Officer for the Alliance in Northern Ireland, said,

'While we do not wish to block this legislation we do believe that its introduction so quickly in Northern Ireland will not give proper time and space for debate and to fully consider the issues involved. This combined with a short consultation period – only 8 weeks rather than the 12 afforded to England and Wales – does not allay fears that Government is seeking to impose legislation here with little understanding of the potential consequences. Introducing the *Getting Equal* proposals in this hurried manner is ill-advised, especially when the British Government is saying it has yet to decide what to do.'

Ends

Media Enquires:

Karen Jardine
Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland
028 9029 2266 / k.jardine@eauk.org

Notes to Editors

1. The Evangelical Alliance UK, formed in 1846, is an umbrella group representing over one million evangelical Christians in the UK and is made up of member churches, organisations and individuals. As part of a movement 'uniting to change society', the Alliance promotes unity and truth, acts as an evangelical voice to the state, society and the wider Church, and provides resources to help members and other evangelicals live out their faith in their communities.
2. The *Getting Equal* consultation was launched by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on 30 July 2006 and responses were required by Monday 25 September 2006. The document can be accessed at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/sexual-orientation.htm>.
3. Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland's response to the document can be found at <http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/public-affairs/consultations.cfm>.

Karen Jardine

Public Affairs & Development Officer Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland

Evangelical Alliance - Uniting to *change* society- www.eauk.org

DDI: 028 9029 2266

Fax: 028 9029 2277

Email: k.jardine@eauk.org

