

**The experiences, expectations and aspirations of black and minority ethnic people in relation to the churches' role in tackling racism**

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**The All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR)**

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## **OVERVIEW**

In 2000, the Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) held a week of discussions with equality bodies, human rights bodies and black and minority ethnic organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In the course of these discussions it became clear that racial justice issues were often not acknowledged by the churches, and that little systematic work was being done by them in challenging racism and promoting good relations with minority ethnic groups. Now, in 2005, the role of churches in addressing and combating racism has changed significantly. There is a general recognition and acknowledgment of the issue of racism throughout society, church leaders have made statements and commitments to addressing the issue, and various church bodies and projects have been established and supported to combat it. Nevertheless, there is an ongoing need by churches to continue with this work, to develop and deepen it, and to initiate further responses to racism as it arises in society.

As a result of the exploration of the situation in 2000, and the conclusions it drew, the Irish Council of Churches and CCRJ (See Appendix I) determined to meet together regularly to attempt to provide information and support for the development of racial justice work in Ireland. These gatherings led to the establishment of the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) in 2003, consisting primarily of representatives from the four largest churches under the auspices of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (See Appendix I).

AICCMR's aim is to encourage and enable the Churches in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland:

- to acknowledge the need to tackle racial justice issues in a more systematic and holistic fashion
- to acknowledge the presence of institutional racism – whether intentional or unwitting
- to be ready to accept the challenge of self-appraisal in order to address issues of tokenism, patronising attitudes and exclusive behaviour in individual organisations
- to be willing to respond to the possible demands of such assessment by providing a genuine welcome that embraces diversity and difference and that seeks integration
- to find ways of helping members overcome and move on from feelings of guilt, through positive action in encouraging minority ethnic people/communities/ churches.

- to discover and develop ways of empowering and supporting the full integration of minority ethnic communities into society.

These aims are founded on the imperative of the Gospel, which proclaims our equality as sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father, and commands us to love one another and to serve those in difficulty.

*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked and you gave my clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.*

(Matthew 25:34-35)

The aims also point us towards the example of the early Church:

*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured.*

(Hebrews 13:1-3)

*Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers”.*

(Romans 12:13-14)

*“Then Peter began to speak to them: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him”.*

(Acts 10: 34, 35)

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights also incorporates a vision of common standards for all persons, irrespective of race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status:

*“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”.*

(Article 2, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

In order to identify and clarify some of the issues facing churches in regard to racism, the AICCMR commissioned a research study in 2004 to elicit the views of a sample of minority ethnic people. The research was to focus on people's experience of Christian churches in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, their perceptions of racism and their recommendations on how churches can respond to it. The aim of the research was not to be representative of all minority ethnic communities and people, as time and resources were limited, but rather to gain an insight into some of the perceptions that a sample of minority ethnic people have in relation to churches in the context of racism.

As a result of the findings from the research, the AICCMR has undertaken to organise a conference in November 2005 entitled "Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment?" with associated follow-up meetings and training sessions organised regionally.

There are four main purposes of the conference.

1. To listen and learn from the experiences of minority ethnic groups and people who have responded to the challenge of difference.
2. To encourage all Christian churches to acknowledge racism as a fundamental issue in society that the churches have a significant role in addressing.
3. To describe and to present anti-racist initiatives that various churches have undertaken, developed or supported.
4. To create the time and space for people to interact, share ideas and concerns, caucus on issues and make a commitment to anti-racist work.

Leaders and representatives from the churches, minority ethnic communities and from various agencies will come together for this event. The Conference will be followed by a series of meetings hosted in Belfast, Dublin and Galway, designed to support and extend anti-racist work and positive engagement with minority ethnic people, including Travellers, by the Christian churches.

## ***THE RESEARCH***

The AICCMR appointed Omi Consultancy to undertake the research and three facilitators were appointed to help gather the information: Kensika Monshengwo, Mary McMahan and Dean T Huggins. The author of this report met with the commissioning body and the three facilitators to agree upon issues around documentation, communication and feedback. A set of questions were developed to facilitate the focus groups. (Appendix II) These questions were adapted for use

with the Chinese community in Belfast and with Travellers in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. (Appendix III) In addition, an interpreter was made available during the consultation with members of the Chinese community in Northern Ireland.

Eight focus group consultations took place with minority ethnic groups in the north and south of Ireland, involving 67 participants. In addition, 28 individual interviews were conducted. A wide range of views and experiences were elicited in this process providing the data necessary to give an overview and an insight into the experiences, expectations and aspirations of black and minority ethnic people in relation to the churches' role in tackling racism.

The participating organisations were:

Republic of Ireland

- Association of Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- African Refugee Network Belfast Seekers in Ireland
- Blanchardstown Travellers Women's Group
- Chinese Christian Church
- Clondalkin Travellers Men's Group
- Belfast Islamic Centre
- Comhlámh
- Integrating Ireland
- Irish Refugee Council
- Multi-Cultural Resource Centre
- Joy in the Nation
- Parish of the Travelling People
- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
- Spiritan Refugees and Asylum Seekers Initiative

The views of the following ethnic groups are represented.

- ~Chinese
- ~Congolese
- ~Georgian
- ~Ghanaian
- ~Indian

~Iraqi

~Jamaican

~Kenyan

~Lebanese

~Mauritian

## ***RESEARCH FINDINGS***

The findings from the research are presented under a series of headings derived from the data analysis. Quotations have been used extensively to highlight people's views and experiences. It should be noted that the findings are based on people's perceptions of churches and of racism. These perceptions do not always accord with what is actually happening in the churches and are informed by individual and, at times, isolated experiences. It is important to understand people's views, even if they may be factually incorrect, as they indicate how they see the world and relate to it.

It should also be understood that consultees were not selected based on their membership of Christian churches. Therefore, some of the views expressed about churches are from people who do not attend or are of a different faith.

The point of the research was to elicit a sample of views and experiences of ethnic minority people. Thus, the following provides a glimpse into the perceptions of a number of ethnic minority people, but it is in no way representative of people from all minority ethnic communities and should not be generalised.

### ***1. CHURCH LEADERSHIP***

Without fail, all consultees pointed to the need for Christian churches to demonstrate both vision and leadership in raising human or moral issues in society which ran counter to their ethos. In particular, this meant denouncing racism in sermons and in public statements in response to racist incidents. It was thought that there needs to be a systematic and strategic approach to challenging racism. There was an expectation that churches would stand up for people who had been victimised and that they could counter negative stereotyping of people from minority ethnic communities.

The following recommendations and requests were stated:

*Churches should provide strong leadership, specifically in condemning all forms of racism and in being a champion of issues relating to minority ethnic communities.*

*The Christian churches are very influential at a local level and should spell out to their congregations that racist attacks are not acceptable behaviour. The level at which condemnation of such behaviour takes place is important. Local churches should send out messages of zero tolerance for racist attitudes and behaviours.*

*When racial attacks happen, Christian leaders need to be vocal and visible – such comments do make a difference at the personal level (to the people who have been affected).*

*A policy or value statement from the Christian churches' leadership saying that they support and want to work with minority ethnic communities would be most welcome.*

*We need a signal to come from church leaders because we are all the handiwork of God... We might look different but we can't and don't want to live in isolation from others.*

*Religion has a big influence on society (in Northern Ireland). Religious leaders can have more weight than politicians.*

Consultees were of the view that the pulpit could be an effective platform for preaching on anti-racism, for providing the theological basis for challenging racism and for addressing issues of concern affecting people seeking asylum, refugees and migrant workers. Consultees also believed that churches are well-placed to use the media and various forms of technology to promote anti-racism and to condemn all forms of racism. Consultees pointed out that if churches are silent in regard to condemning, highlighting or tackling racism, then this would serve to reinforce any perception that there is a lack of leadership from the Christian churches on these issues.

There was a perception amongst some consultees that *“the Church is so pre-occupied with presenting itself correctly that it doesn't say anything”* and that *“there is an undercurrent of defensiveness”*. One person stated, *“When families are intimidated out of their homes, there are no strong statements from church leaders”*. Another felt that there was no *“consistent and clear church leadership on racial issues”*.

Since racism was seen as contrary to Christian values, some consultees queried why churches *“do not do on home ground what they do abroad in terms of social justice and campaigning for human rights”*. One interviewee said, *“There is no*

*church leadership on racial issues*". Consultees said they would encourage the churches to collaborate with others in campaigning and to undertake to lobby and/or provide political support in order to influence policy and decision-makers in addressing racism.

*The Church has to stand or act as a mediator between immigrants and the Government. The Church needs to continue to inform its local members of the importance of giving the new communities a chance to prove their capabilities.*

Consultees were keen to point out that actions taken by churches would need to be informed by dialogue and consultations with the groups themselves or the individuals involved.

*Churches should make representation to Government; however, where the church seeks to make representation about minority ethnic people and/or issues, it needs to do so only on the back of informed discussion with the people concerned.*

## **2. NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS**

Unfortunately, a number of interviewees have had negative experiences with churches. In some cases, people perceived that some churches are not only failing to address the problem of racism but at times are contributing to it. In the data, churches were described by some interviewees as '*aloof*', '*inward-looking*', '*separate*', '*frightened of us*', '*condescending*', '*patronising*' and '*apologetic*'. It was suggested by some respondents that these church attitudes were prompted by ignorance and influenced by an acceptance of public prejudice and negative stereotyping of minority ethnic people. Consultees felt they were often not seen as '*distinct individuals*' in society and in churches but were viewed as a category.

*We don't like people making assumptions about us, feeling sorry for us. Just get to know us, understand our mannerisms and our cultures.*

The lack of knowledge and the confusion between truth and myth with regard to minority ethnic people particularly impacted on those seeking asylum in Ireland, north and south. Consultees felt that the churches should openly and actively oppose untruths spread by the media about people seeking asylum.

Consultees in general, but particularly Christians, said they expected churches to be welcoming. Instead, some reported that people did not greet them when they attended a church service and in some cases people found that churches did not know how to react to black and minority ethnic people. One African woman told of her experience after moving into her home in Northern Ireland:

*The local church minister (denomination provided) brought tins of food and spoons to our home but did not invite us into his church. They (the church) were saying we were poor. I was insulted. Would the same thing have happened to a white person moving into the area? It was not tactful.*

Worse still, a few consultees believed that churches saw themselves in the role of needing to “civilise heathens” and that Travellers and other minority ethnic groups were the heathens that are “beneath and below (the church)”, therefore, justifying the need to “be saved”. They felt that there was a perception within the Church that “only Christians are good” and that this attitude tended to perpetuate the continued focus on supporting “those poor people in the Third World”. These consultees pointed out that black and minority ethnic people living in Ireland - many of whom would have migrated from those same Third World countries - were not given the practical, emotional and social support that is so often generously exported.

A number of Travellers reported having had negative experiences in relation to churches. Their experience was that the church (particular ones they had visited) generally “does not talk to us” and “does not see us as fellow human beings”. As a result, their expectations of churches were very low. They would “never expect a local priest to offer help on issues of discrimination and racism” and not expect “a local priest to come around Traveller sites or to offer help to combat the discrimination faced by Travellers regularly when in shops and supermarkets”. One interviewee also said that she would not consider approaching the church to campaign alongside Travellers about issues of social injustice, as when the introduction of the Trespass Law in the Republic of Ireland in 2003 was proposed.

Some of the Travellers who attended church services said that they would like to be involved in church services, perhaps as altar servers or readers. It was reported, however, apart from one Catholic Church, consultees could not recall any other churches encouraging their involvement in such activity. Traveller women said they have never been asked to be involved with Parish Councils.

Some consultees recalled separate toilet provision being made available specifically for Travellers in a Traveller Training Centre in Dublin (area provided) run by “a religious person”. They said that they could not believe that one of the first church initiatives for promoting Traveller employment had resorted to providing segregated toilet facilities. This resulted in some Travellers refusing to use the training facility.

Travellers who were consulted said that the Church was an important part of their lives; however, they drew a distinction between individual faith and the church and most saw the church as “a building” and “a place of worship, refuel and solace” rather than as a community in which they were full participants.

### **3. CHURCH OUTREACH**

The research identified the importance, from the perspectives of the interviewees, of the churches leading by example through the promotion of anti-racist behaviour, attitudes and actions in parishes and institutions attached to churches.

*We need (the churches to demonstrate) less apathy and more empathy or compassion (towards minority ethnic people).*

It should be pointed out that some of what has been suggested by the research sample is already happening in some places. A number of local churches provide drop-in centres and open up their facilities for different activities. The work of some churches indicates that there is concern about the general welfare of people with whom they have contact and not only spiritual dimensions. Nevertheless, there is great scope for churches to do more and the suggestions offered by interviewees indicate many worthwhile approaches that can be taken to addressing racism and welcoming new residents.

Consultees were keen to point out that outreach by means of visits to homes (including Traveller sites) or invitations to events/regular meetings was an important means of communicating with and involving black and minority ethnic people in church-related activities. There was also room for churches to take part in activities planned and organised by minority ethnic groups themselves.

According to consultees, outreach from the churches should have a practical focus, and it was important for the support offered by churches to be made available to black and minority ethnic people of all faiths and none.

*Churches need to be more proactive and invite people to churches to talk about religion ... not to convert ... we're simply trying to understand one another.*

*Keep theology to a minimum – be amongst us in our communities and our places of work.*

Other suggestions for practical outreach included churches organising events during International Day Against Racism, European Week Against Racism and Racial Justice Sunday and disseminating information about their services and activities to minority ethnic community support groups. It was suggested that churches which have women's groups and youth groups should try to involve and welcome minority ethnic people into their activities. It was felt that churches have an important role in understanding cultural issues in relation to minority ethnic individuals/groups in order that respect can be visibly and actively promoted towards those groups.

Some consultees advocated for churches to provide refuge for those minority ethnic people who are being visibly harassed. Churches, according to some other consultees, could also contribute to providing people with the skills to get involved and to set up structures that would encourage self-development. It was also suggested that churches could help financially to support anti-racism organisations and programmes.

A number of other practical suggestions were also put forward by individual interviewees. These included:

- Churches to lend moral and financial support to people appealing their refugee status;
- Churches to provide drop-in centres so that people can have the opportunity to integrate, to share and to learn about each other in a safe environment;
- Churches to open their facilities for the use of minority ethnic groups – for church-related and other activities;
- Churches to assist minority ethnic people in accessing essential services and facilities, particularly in the field of education and health; and
- Churches to demonstrate concern about the social and emotional well-being in addition to the spiritual well-being of minority ethnic people, in particular those who are relatively new to the country.

Consultees were adamant that the inclusion of black and minority ethnic groups, including refugees, people seeking asylum and Travellers, needed to be visible within the structures and responsibility posts in the churches. They said that minority ethnic leadership within white majority churches cannot emerge while there is little or no contact, interaction and consultation with black and minority ethnic people.

There is recognition, however, that there might be difficulties for a leader of a church in tackling racial justice issues “*because the congregation would say ‘you’re helping minorities and not helping us’*”. Consultees believed that churches tended to focus on local and family connections and on issues directly related to church members; as a result, churches often failed to “*see the bigger picture*”.

*The Church needs to break down barriers. Jesus walked among the people – the Church has to find a way of engaging people that is not patronising. The Church needs to see people as they are and create opportunities for contact. It must build on what it has.*

*Minority ethnic people are brothers and sisters of the churches. Local churches should bring in minority ethnic people to talk to their congregations about their communities.*

Some interviewees stated that special attention needs to be paid to the black and minority ethnic churches as they represent the successful attempts by black and minority ethnic groups in Ireland to self-organise and develop. They are important institutions and very effective channels to meet and work with black and minority ethnic groups including refugees and people seeking asylum.

One person expressed with concern the view that the newly-established black majority churches were not taken seriously by the more established churches and that doubts had been openly expressed about the bona fide nature of the black majority churches.

#### **4. NORTHERN IRELAND: LINK BETWEEN RACISM AND SECTARIANISM?**

Consultees in Northern Ireland were of the view that there was a relationship between sectarianism and racism. They cited a number of experiences of the pressures they had encountered to conform to the attitudes or expectations of associating with either the 'Catholic' or 'Protestant' community.

*People here (in Northern Ireland) are very uncomfortable with diversity among themselves – they do not even deal with their own differences.*

*People here (in Northern Ireland) have very narrow and blinkered views. My religion has no bearing whatever on my politics. It is, however, assumed otherwise.*

Some interviewees living in Northern Ireland found that “everyone wanted you to take sides” but they felt that “people should not expect you to be involved in their ‘fight’”. Some said that when indigenous people discovered them to be co-religionists, they were assumed to be “one of them – politically”.

Another consultee said:

*I don't tell my neighbours what my religious belief is in case such information is used against me. Minority ethnic people are easily targeted and identified. Such identification can then provide a rationale for assault. When I lived in London, going to a denominational church was no problem at all and there was no adverse impact on my life/livelihood. Here in Northern Ireland, it is a real problem.*

A number of Chinese consultees said that they were Catholics but that they were frightened to attend a Catholic church; so they either worshiped in a Protestant church or they worshiped at home. In the words of one consultee: *"It is a case of either can't go, don't go or daren't go!"*

One made the following comment:

*"Many minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland are suspicious about Church groups because they do not want to identify or be seen to belong to one side or the other. They don't want to be drawn into the Northern Ireland conflict. In that sense, the Belfast Chinese Christian Church is 'neutral' territory. People can come to this church without being labeled in the Northern Ireland sense. It is also a place where those coming can use their language for worship and maintain their culture. Many Chinese people are confused about the political/ historical struggle in Northern Ireland."*

All the respondents from Northern Ireland shared the view that the education system had contributed considerably to the perpetuation of divisions. Consultees felt that the churches should promote integration in schools at both primary and secondary levels.

## **5. TRAINING**

According to consultees, church congregations, and in particular their staff and volunteers, should be provided with cultural diversity training, anti-racism and anti-sectarianism training. Consultees recommended that training be provided on a formal basis (as in specific workshops being planned into a church's annual programme) as well as providing opportunities for less formal learning through direct interaction with people from minority ethnic communities.

Consultees felt that cultural diversity training workshops should aim to teach people to extend welcomes, initiate friendships and accept diversity and differences. Clumsy and offensive approaches could then be avoided. Some consultees were also of the opinion that there was a need for majority ethnic groups to acknowledge that people had multiple identities as this would help to reduce stereotyping.

All consultees recommended that anti-racism training be made available not only to church volunteers, staff and members but also to those preparing for church ministry. These workshops, according to consultees, should aim to counteract the myths and misinformation propagated by negative media portrayal of black and minority ethnic groups. They should also demonstrate the contribution that had been made by black and minority ethnic people to society in general.

One consultee presented the dilemma that could result from a lack of such training:

*Whilst church leaders themselves might be acquainted with the needs/challenges faced by minority ethnic groups, they do not do enough to communicate/dialogue with their ordinary members. This in turn translates into miscommunication with minority ethnic groups and sometimes leads to unnecessary friction.*

It was felt that anti-sectarianism training was needed to counteract a perceived high level of sectarianism in relation to Muslims. Consultees also suggested that children and young people should be taught about racism and the impact of racism on society. This could be offered at Sunday School and through youth activities organised by churches. Other ways of teaching suggested by consultees included the organisation of seasonal lectures, seminars and ecumenical conferences, and the publication of information in church newsletters.

## **6. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOUND IN THE CHURCHES**

The data indicate that respondents were aware of some of the work that churches had undertaken to address racism and to meet the needs of minority ethnic groups. Some interviewees cited practical activities that churches had been involved in while others referred to statements or policies that churches have made.

*The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has a policy on asylum seekers and refugees ... and is the only Christian church with a Race Relations Committee<sup>1</sup>. That is really good policy.*

*The Commission for Justice and Peace<sup>2</sup> does a great job on the policy and media front and people listen to and trust the organisation.*

*The Irish Catholic Bishops have called upon the Government of the State to ensure that in a situation where residency in Ireland is granted to non-Irish national parents of an Irish child that other children in the family, wherever they were born, should be included.*

*The Catholic Church was involved in campaigning for people seeking asylum to have the right to work and was actively involved in the Coalition Against the Deportation of Irish Children.*

A number of churches were mentioned as providing helpful services to minority ethnic people in their communities. Clonard Monastery in Belfast was cited as being proactive with migrant workers and had responded to the presence of Filipino nurses at the Royal Hospital by issuing invitations to Mass, by having one Mass each month in Spanish, by putting up posters in the nursing accommodation advertising the church services, Novenas and women's groups as well as by having leaflets at the entrance to the church with specific ones for the Philippino community.

Visits to hostels and accommodation centres by church members were seen as a good way to alleviate some of the problems that people seeking asylum experience of living in direct provision. A number of drop-in centres were mentioned that provided useful services to people. These included the Vincentian Refugee Centre in the Phibsboro area in Dublin, the Good Shepherd Church in Belfast and Belfast Central Mission. These centres and outreach work by churches were described by one interviewee as, "*good for people when crisis situations develop; they know where there is help at hand*". One person praised one church that, "*paid bail to release people from detention*". EMBRACE was cited as an example of good practice in the way that it provides practical support to refugees and people seeking asylum.

The Parish of the Travelling People gets involved with Travellers' lives and Travellers responded to this by having a particular welcome for the priests of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Race Relations Committee is known as the Race Relations Panel.

<sup>2</sup> The Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP) has now been replaced by the Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs.

Travellers' Parish. Travellers in the Republic of Ireland said they would use the Parish priests rather than the local clergy for marriage ceremonies. Consultees talked about a pre-marital course (ACCORD) that the Catholic Church runs. Travellers were expected to undertake this course like their co-religionists; however, those running the course decided to undertake a consultation with Travellers as they felt they knew nothing about Travellers' marriage customs. Subsequent to the initial consultation, the course facilitators undertook anti-racism and cultural awareness training. Consultees said this was an example of evolving good practice.

A number of churches were reported to have engaged with minority ethnic people by holding evening meetings with them, sending round leaflets to churches, hospitals and local community centres and by hosting an open door event three or four times a year. Various churches, it was stated, have held services where racial justice issues have been raised in sermons or where a person from a minority ethnic community was invited to speak about his/her experiences. One consultee said that he was invited to speak about his experience as a person seeking asylum, and opportunities were provided for dialogue.

Other churches have made their facilities available for use by groups for meetings and other activities. The Kingham Church in Belfast has made its facilities available to the Chinese Welfare Association's Women's Group for several years. It was said that this has helped to promote integration and respect for different beliefs and cultures. Some churches have offered services in foreign languages; others have integrated their worship with music and words from different cultures.

Collectively, it seems that there are a wide range of initiatives that churches have undertaken both at an institutional and at a local level to combat racism and to respond to the various needs of minority ethnic people. The data suggest that there is more work that needs to be done in this area and that churches can play a significant role in providing leadership and moral voice as well as in building up relationships and delivering practical assistance.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings from this research, although limited and not fully representative, indicate that some churches need to acknowledge racism as an issue that has to be confronted and dealt with at a local level. The data suggest strongly that the leadership of the churches needs to be even more vocal in response to racism and related issues and to challenge negative views often associated with or directed at Travellers, migrant workers and those seeking asylum.

Respondents saw the churches as occupying a prominent role in Irish society with a great deal of influence in the media, government and at a community level. While further research would be needed to examine the views and experiences of people from minority ethnic communities in more detail, the findings indicate that the Christian churches in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have much work to do and can have a real impact in shaping the treatment and acceptance of new residents.

The data also indicated that many churches had been engaging meaningfully with minority ethnic communities and responding to their needs. A number of initiatives and projects have been undertaken by churches suggesting that there is good work being developed which can be built upon and expanded. It is within this context that the AICCMR is organizing its conference with a view to supporting the good work which has been undertaken as well as encouraging others within the churches to respond to the challenges and opportunities facing minority ethnic people.

## ***APPENDIX I***

### **Irish Council of Churches (ICC)**

The ICC provides ecumenical space for its fifteen member churches to meet, pray and act together throughout the island of Ireland. With roots dating back to 1922, the Council's membership now embraces a Christian witness that includes Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, Free, Evangelical/Charismatic and Pentecostal church traditions. Between them, they provide a network of nearly 1800 faith communities scattered throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic. Many of these have significant links with people born outside the island.

The Council's work builds the common ground for churches to work together in international relations; home mission; peace education; distributing cross-community grants and loans; advocacy with governments on policy development; networking with ecumenical groups and the NGO sectors in both NI and the Republic. The ICC also relates to other national ecumenical instruments in Britain, Europe and at the global level. It is currently reviewing its task and priorities with its members, its ecumenical partners and local inter-church groups. It has a small staff of 1.5 FTE and an office administrator.

Further details from the General Secretary (Michael Earle), Inter-Church Centre, 48, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ. Ph. 028 (Rep 048) 9066 3145. Email: [irish.churches@btconnect.com](mailto:irish.churches@btconnect.com)

### **Irish Inter Church Meeting (IICM)**

Since the first meeting in Ballymascanlon in 1973, the ICC churches have been meeting quarterly with representatives from the Irish Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church. These meetings are co-Chaired by the President of the ICC and the Primate of All Ireland. This is primarily a discussion forum to share concerns and raise issues. Regular reports are received from groups with responsibility for social issues or ad hoc working parties. There is a formal meeting every 18 months, the last being held in May 2005 in Cork when an inter-church resource on Spirituality was published for congregational use. Further details from the Executive Secretary (Michael Earle) at the Belfast office.

**The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI's) Commission for Racial Justice** has been formed by the churches themselves to monitor trends in 'race' relations in British and Irish society, to encourage the exchange of information among the churches regarding these trends and, in conjunction with the churches' own committees responsible for 'race' issues, to coordinate a response. This includes among others the Church of England Committees on Race and Community Relations and Black Anglican Concerns, the Catholic Bishops' Conference Committee on Community Relations, the Methodist Church Committee for Racial Justice, the Church of Scotland Working Group on Racism, the Scottish Churches' Agency for Racial Justice, the CYTUN (Wales) Sub Committee on Racial Justice, the United Reformed Church Committee for Church and Society, the Baptist Union Social Action Committee, the Society of Friends Committee for Social Justice and relevant bodies among the Black Majority Churches.

**The Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) also has a Projects Fund**, supported mainly by Christian Aid, the Church of England and the Methodist Church which funds local and national groups and organisations combating racism or overcoming racial discrimination. Its policy is decided by a Commission of 25 representatives from CTBI member churches, including those of African and African Caribbean origin.

## ***APPENDIX II***

**Questions:**

1. What direct support do you feel churches can provide and why? Please think of this in terms of:

1. tackling racism;
2. provision of pastoral care;
3. respect of other Christian traditions;
4. respect for different faiths or beliefs;
5. outreaching or being more proactive;
6. promoting social inclusion; and
7. promoting interaction and dialogue.

*[Prompts: media (mis-)representation; accessing health, education, training, employment, housing, goods, facilities and services; racial abuse and violence]*

1. What examples of either good or bad practice can you share with us?

2. In addition to churches working directly to support you, what indirect actions do you feel they can take on your behalf, for example, making representations to Government?

What examples of either good or bad practice can you share with us?

3. What would you like to see churches do in order to provide the support that has been identified?

4. Is there anything else you would like to say?

### ***APPENDIX III***

#### **Questions used during focus group consultations with Travellers and with the Chinese community in Belfast:**

1. What direct support do you feel the Christian Church can provide to your community to tackle racism?
2. Why do you think Christian churches should tackle racism?
3. How could the Christian Church provide pastoral care to people and communities of a different faith background?
4. Do you think the Christian churches should do this?
5. How do you think the Christian Church could better promote respect for different faiths or beliefs?
6. Do you think it is important that the Christian churches promote respect for different faiths and beliefs?
7. How do you think the Christian Church could be more pro-active and out reaching to your community?

8. How do you think the Christian Church could better promote social inclusion for minority ethnic people?
9. How could the Christian Church promote interaction and dialogue with your community?

*[Prompts: media (mis-)representation; accessing health, education, training, employment, housing, goods, facilities and services; racial abuse and violence]*

10. Can you give us any examples of either good or bad practice that you are aware of with Christian churches and your community?
11. In addition to the churches working directly to support you, what indirect actions do you feel they can take on your behalf, for example, making representations to Government?
12. Can you give any examples of either good or bad practice where this has happened/not happened and you thought it should happen?
13. What would you like to see the churches do in order to provide the support that has been identified?

