

STATEMENT BY THE EQUALITY COALITION CO-CONVENERS CAJ AND UNISON



Friday 18 June 2021

Responding to yesterday's reappointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Co-Conveners of the Equality Coalition are urging the UK government and Stormont administration to implement the outstanding rights-based commitments arising from the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement and other components of the peace process.

The Equality Coalition is a network of over 100 NGOs and trade unions that aims to promote and advance equality in Northern Ireland. During the period of collapse of the institutions in 2019 the Coalition produced a ['Manifesto for a rights based return to power sharing'](#). More recently, in April 2021, the Coalition produced an updated ['mapping exercise'](#), which highlighted all of NI's outstanding rights-based commitments, 23 years on from the Good Friday Agreement.

The Coalition Co-conveners, Patricia McKeown (UNISON) and Daniel Holder (CAJ), stated: "It should be recalled that the institutions were restored under New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement on the back of mobilisations by health workers. The Coalition sought a sustainable 'rights based return' of the institutions largely on the basis of the implementation of previous commitments to underpin rights and equality. The exacerbation of inequalities caused by the pandemic makes this all the more important - there can be 'no going back to the normal' in any sense.

"Whilst the NDNA agreement provided for significant progress, clearly such progress won't happen if its commitments are obstructed or reneged upon. There has been some forward movement on certain NDNA commitments – not least the establishment of the Assembly Bill of Rights Committee and the production of blueprints for an anti-poverty strategy and additional strategies on disability, gender equality, and LGBTQI+ rights. Yet clearly we have reverted back into a space where other commitments are being blocked – including the Irish language and broader legislation published with NDNA that was to be implemented 'within 100 days'.

"To date, with less than a year at most to run till the next election, there is still no adopted Programme for Government, despite its draft content also being negotiated and published as part of NDNA. The NDNA commitments on workers rights have also not progressed and we have seen the recent thwarting of justice legislation that would progress measures to tackle gender-based violence.

"Where international human rights obligations are concerned the GFA is clear that Westminster is to step in if opponents of rights and equality prevent delivery of commitments through Stormont. This is entirely consistent with the devolution settlement. The Irish language act clearly falls into that space, as do women's reproductive rights. The UK government – which itself has long track record of non-delivery – must now discharge its duties in all areas where progress at Stormont has been blocked."

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